

20 December 2017
Advent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

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“The Fullness of Your Glory”

Text: Isaiah 49:1-6; Colossians 1:15-29; Matthew 2:1-12

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

So far in our Advent meditations, we have considered the words of the communion liturgy used during the Advent season, which speak of when Jesus **comes again in glory**, and the words used during the Christmas season, which speak of the incarnation as **a new revelation of [God’s] glory**. Tonight, we will conclude by considering the words used during the Epiphany season, which say:

*It is truly meet, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord; for what had been hidden from before the foundation of the world You have made known to the nations in Your Son. In Him, being found in the substance of our mortal nature, **You have manifested the fullness of Your glory.***

When something is full, you cannot add anything more to it. So it is with Jesus and the glory of God. Here in this child, *in the substance of our mortal nature*, is the fullness of God’s glory. If you are looking for something more glorious, you simply will not, cannot, find it. This is it. The fullness of God’s glory.

The Wise Men came to realize that. When they first started following the star they saw in the East, what did they expect to find when they arrived at their destination? We’re not told, but I’m fairly certain it wasn’t what they finally found. After going first to the earthly king in all his glory, and to the capital city of Jerusalem in all its splendor, God told them to go someplace else to see His glory. Earthly glory is not how it is with God.

In the Old Testament, God was happy dwelling with His people in a tent. It was men who wanted to build Him a big, glorious Temple. So here, too, God is pleased to dwell with us in the midst of poverty. And in poverty we see His glory. The Wise Men did, anyway. For they didn’t just give Him gifts, they fell down, face down, prostrate on the ground, and worshipped Him. Their glory was as nothing before His glory. Before the glory of the fact that ***the fullness of the Godhead*** was dwelling in this child. The almighty God, creator of all things, is here, like this, with us.

If we would be wise like the Wise Men, it would do us well to consider this for a moment. That the fullness of the Godhead was dwelling in Jesus. Realize what that

means! That from the moment of His conception by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary, the fullness of the Godhead was dwelling here, like this, with us. *The fullness*. Which means that not just a part of God is here with us, but all of God. God is *all in* to save us sinful, fallen, mortal men and women.

Now, to be sure, part of this is beyond our understanding, that the fullness of God is dwelling in Jesus, even though only the Son of God became incarnate - not the Father nor the Holy Spirit. This is part of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. But the Son is 100% God, so it is proper for us to say that God is born for us, God lived as a man for us, and God died on the cross for us. And that this is why the fullness of the Godhead dwelled in Jesus - so that God could take upon Himself our sin and die, so that we can live.

No wonder the angels of God couldn't not break out in joy at the announcement of this birth to the shepherds, crying out: *Glory to God in the highest* (Luke 2:14)! Yes, glory to God in the highest, who is now dwelling in this baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. What a glorious thing indeed.

But I think that is *only half* of what God manifesting the fullness of His glory here means. The other half is this: that the fullness of God's glory is that the fullness of His glory *is here for all people* - for **the fullness of humanity**. Not one person excepted. Whether you are Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, slave or free, high or low, what Jesus is doing He does not for some, but for all. Or as the prophet Isaiah said it tonight, in prophesying about the coming Messiah:

***“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”***

For all the nations. To the end of the earth. And we could say this too: for all time. From the very first man and woman to the very last, the fullness of God and His salvation is here for them. For us.

Paul said it in an even greater, more expansive way, when after saying that in Jesus ***all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell***, he said this too: ***and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross***. All things. All people. All of creation. For as all of creation was plunged into sin and death by sin, so all of creation - the fullness of creation - would be redeemed by Jesus. The fullness of God for the fullness of creation. The glory of God is to give the fullness of Himself to us, to make us glorious once again.

That, it seems to me, is the very definition of grace. For we deserve that not at all. Not even for God to consider such a thing, let alone do it. But He did, and so there is hope for

us. He did, and brought the Wise Men to show us. That He is not just *the King of the Jews*, but the King of all, who wants nothing more than to serve us all with His gifts, to give us life, and for us to be with Him - in the fullness of His glory - forever.

It may be bumpy on the way, though. The fullness of God in the man Jesus met no small amount of opposition and hatred, and then was put on the cross. Paul himself suffered mightily until he was beheaded. And Isaiah (according to tradition) was sawn in two. So even as I wondered earlier what the Wise Men expected to find at the end of their journey, I wonder, too, what our journey holds? What will we see? What will come upon us? How will our life end?

Of course, I don't know the answer to those questions. But this seems to be something we can learn this Advent season: that if there is glory for us as Christians, it will not be the kind we usually think of. Man's kind. It will be God's kind. The incarnation kind. The suffering kind. The Christ in us kind. For as the fullness of God dwelt in Jesus in the incarnation, so God now dwells in us through His Holy Spirit given us in Baptism. And the Holy Spirit, who makes us holy in the forgiveness of our sins, will also glorify us in the end. Even as He is now. Even if you don't feel, look, or seem very glorious.

So take a cue from the Wise Men. Don't worry about what looks, seems, or feels glorious, believe instead the Word of God and the promises made there to you. And when Jesus, who is **a new revelation of the glory of God**, and in whom **the fullness of God's glory dwells, when He comes again in glory**, will take you to be with Him in His kingdom forever. For all that He does, He does for you.

And that is truly His glory.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.