24 December 2024 St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

Readings and Carols Meditations

Genesis 3:1-15

It's broken.

That will be uttered more than a few times tomorrow as gifts that were received are dropped, cracked, shattered, or in some other way damaged. Maybe the gift wasn't as sturdy as hoped. Maybe it was carelessness. With a child, tears may flow as well. Their joy so quickly turned to sorrow.

It's broken.

So it was for Adam and Eve. Except they didn't just break creation, they gift they received - they broke *themselves*. *We're* broken, they realized. When they didn't follow the directions. And there was no going back. No tape, glue, or fig leaves could fix what they broke. For this was no small crack or tear; but a great shattering. Their perfect gift, perfect home, gone in an instant.

And as parents console a sobbing child, maybe even offering to replace was got broken, so, too, God consoles Adam and Eve. And promises to fix what they broke. As we will hear tonight, it will be a costly fix, though. For the one He will send to do this, to fix this . . . the one who will bruise the serpent's head while suffering injury Himself . . . will be God's own eternal and beloved Son. That in Him creation be restored and we be redeemed.

So the story begins. And no matter how much you spent on gifts this year, you didn't spend more than that! That's the gift of gifts! That's how much God loves you.

Isaiah 9:2-7

Many hundreds of years went by. And *still* the world was broken. Still *we* were broken. People were walking in deep darkness, with heavy burdens and dreadful oppression. There was war, slavery, conquest, rivalry, family feuds. Oh, there were some good times, too. But they didn't last. Mostly, things seemed to be getting *worse*, not better.

Did God forget? Was He able to do what He had promised? Did He change His mind? They tried to keep the faith, but the faith was hard to keep. Parents sometimes make promises they get too busy, or too distracted, or too selfish to keep. God, too?

No! Isaiah said. And God sent prophets like him to repeat His promises to the world. He hasn't forgotten. He isn't too busy. He is able. And He did not change His mind. ***The zeal of the Lord of hosts*** **will** ***do this***.

Do what? Give His Son to us. When ***a child is born*** for us. To shoulder the burden that is crushing us. The burden of governing this ungovernable world. To lighten the darkness, give joy for sorrow, and end the great tumult. To be a just and righteous King. To be the Prince of Peace.

God is faithful. ***The zeal of the Lord of hosts*** **will** ***do this***. Soon.

Isaiah 11:1-10

Are you sure, Isaiah? Things don't look so good. Jesse's son David built this kingdom up so grand and glorious and strong . . . but look at it now. It's like . . . a stump. The stump of a tree that was once so strong and majestic, in which birds and critters nested. Now it's nothing. It's dead. You said God keeps his promises. Well?

I'll bet you've asked that same question. Maybe a lot! Maybe now. When things don't look so good in your life. When your tree, your life, seems to be tottering, and on the verge of stumphood . . .

There ***shall*** come forth a shoot from this stump, ***the stump of Jesse***, Isaiah says. And he says that over and over, in different ways. **There shall. He shall**. *Twenty* times in just these ten verses, by my count. *Shall*. Shall is the great word of promise, and faith. It ***shall*** happen, just as He said. One ***shall*** come filled with the Spirit of God. Creation ***shall*** be restored in peace. The wars and the hurting ***shall*** end. Just a little longer, until ***a little child shall lead them***.

A little child. The promised child. Who will have a glorious resting place. In a manger. In a tomb. Places we don't think so glorious, but they are when this child is in them. For it's not the place that makes this child glorious - it's this child that makes these places glorious. And He shall. He *shall*.

Titus 3:4-7

Saint Paul wrote to Titus after the fact, after this child came. Paul calls Him ***the***

goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour. All the goodness and loving kindness of God squeezed together and put in one place, in one man. And with all that goodness and kindness, look what He did: ***He saved us***. He did it! All the promises of God fulfilled. Not because of us, cuz' we broke it! But *because of His mercy*.

Mercy which is even more than recreating a broken *world* and redeeming *mankind*. It is mercy *for you*. Personal mercy. Goodness and loving kindness mercy.

If your car is dirty, you hose it down. God did that once to the world, with a flood. But you don't do that to your small children. They get special care. And so do you. For this child of God, once washed by His mother, *now washes you*. A ***washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit***. The same Spirit of which Isaiah spoke, that filled this child, now given to you. To save you, yes. To forgive you, yes. But even more, Paul says - the make you ***an heir***, a child who will inherit all that God your Father has! His life and His kingdom.

We call it baptism. That is where the child God promised, His own eternal and beloved Son, keeps coming to us and making us children of God. It's pretty amazing, this ***goodness and loving kindness of God***. That He would do so much for us. But He did. And is. And it all started this night.

Matthew 1:18-25

Why me? Think Joseph asked that question a time or two? What had he done to deserve this? It wasn't right. It wasn't fair. *Why me God?*

Joseph was right. He didn't deserve . . . this **honor**! Oh, that's not what he was thinking. *Or what you were thinking*. You and (perhaps) he were thinking he didn't deserve the shame, the hardship, the pain, the trouble, the confusion. Maybe, maybe not. But *really* what he didn't deserve was **this honor**. The honor of being betrothed to the mother of God. The honor of being the guardian of God's Son. But for this he was chosen by God. By grace.

Yes, Joseph, God was fulfilling His promise of old. This child is not just a child, but ***Immanuel***, God with us. God in this tiny baby. Which can't be! But is. ***The zeal of the Lord of hosts had done it!***

Why me God? Next time you ask that question (and I'm sure there will be a next time!), maybe remember Joseph. Maybe there's more going on than meets the eye. Maybe God is with you, even in the pain. Maybe God is . . . *honoring you!*

Joseph woke from sleep and did as he was commanded. I'm sure it wasn't easy. I'm sure it took great courage and faith. It probably will for you, too. To do what God has given you to do. But the faith you need is the faith God gives. For God is faithful. How do you know? Look in the manger. Joseph did. ***And he called his name Jesus***.

Luke 2:1-7

And it came to pass.

Caesar Augustus didn't notice. His eyes were filled with visions not of sugar plums, but of tax revenue. Cyrenius had more important things, government things, on his mind. And all those pilgrims that filled the roads were, perhaps, too busy grumbling to notice the man with his very pregnant wife on the journey with them. But there they were, going to ***the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because they were of the house and lineage of David***.

And a child was born.

The child of God's promise which first filled the ears of Adam and Eve.
The Son given to shoulder the crushing burdens of this world and life.
The child that shall lead a world back to Paradise and raise men and women fallen into sin.
The who showed us the goodness and loving kindness of God.
The son who is not just the child of Mary, but the Son of God, ***God with us***.

That child, that Son, is now here, wrapped in swaddling clothes, not royal robes, laid not in a soft bed, but in a manger, and whose attendants are not adoring family or guests, but animals.

The Nativity scenes that we see so much this time of year capture that image, but only partly. Part of it must remain a mystery. That the almighty, all-present, all-knowing God would do this, <u>*be*</u> this, for us. It boggles the mind. But shouldn't it be so with God? He *should* be doing things beyond our imagination. And He is.

And not only with this birth, but in your life. Many, like Caesar and Cyrenius, won't notice. They're too busy with other things, more important things. Or so they think. But let that not be us. Let us stop and know that on that *Silent Night, Christ, the Savior, is born!* And on <u>this</u> Silent Night, let us pray that the light that beams from His holy face fill us with wonder, faith, and love. To believe. To confess. And to love one another as He has loved us.

Luke 2:8-20

It seems that angels appearing and singing to a group of shepherds near Bethlehem was quite the unusual and irregular thing that night. But actually, it is quite the opposite. Angels and men were meant to dwell with each other in joy and peace. That this is unusual and irregular is because of our brokenness. So their presence this night is not only to herald the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, *but is also a sign* - that what was broken is being put back together this night. Things are returning to normal. So ***Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace, goodwill toward men***.

And the shepherds went to Bethlehem and saw that of which they were told. They saw Jesus, there, in the manger, in swaddling clothes, for them. And that's what we are doing tonight as well, coming to this place, as we have been told, for Jesus is here, on the altar, under bread and wine, for us. Same Jesus. Same Body and Blood. *<u>They</u>* were filled with joy at salvation come. *<u>We</u>* are filled with joy at salvation accomplished and given, as we eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins.

And for our brokenness. For when we break things still. For our doubts and fears. For our stubbornness and rebellion. For all the ways we have not lived as the sons and daughters of God we are. So we come and join the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven here, and give glory to God as *<u>He</u>* gives Himself to us.

And the promise is kept. A Saviour is born. A Saviour for the world. A Saviour for Adam and Eve, for Isaiah, Titus, and Paul, for Casear and Cyrenius, and for you. ***Good tidings of great joy***. ***Ponder this in your heart.*** This *Joy, to the World*.

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