25 December 2024 St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
The Nativity of Our Lord Vienna, VA

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"We Have Seen His Glory"
Text: John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:1-12; Isaiah 52:7-10

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There are many different ways the birth of Jesus is depicted. Some show the holy family in a stable, some in a cave. Some show Jesus in a wooden manger, some in a stone manger that looks like a little tomb - foreshadowing His death.

Take a look at the cover of your bulletin today. What do you see? How is Jesus' *manger* depicted for us there? Do you see it? It looks like **an altar**. For from the moment of His birth, the Father was giving His Son for the life of the world. He was laying His Son on the altar as the sacrifice for the sin of the world. A sacrifice He would actually carry out. He stayed Father Abraham's hand and spared his son, Isaac, the son of the promise. But He would not spare His own Son of the promise. For this He came. For this He was born. To die as our sacrificial Lamb.

That kind of bursts the *Silent Night, O Little Town of Bethlehem* vibe! But not to take away that joy, but to give us even more joy! There is a time and place for the traditional nativity scenes, living nativities, candlelights and Christmas pageants. But let them not overshadow this glorious reality and truth - that this child was, even now, as an infant, *destroying the works of the devil* (1 John 3:8). For here was a child neither sin nor satan had corrupted. For here, in this child, ***the Word became flesh and dwelt among us***.

John tells us so much about Him. He is the eternal God. Through Him all things were made. He is life. He is the light of God's truth and love in the darkness of this world's sin and death.

We learn also in the reading we heard from **Hebrews**, that He is the ***exact imprint of God's nature*** - which means: *you see Him, you see God*. And He not only created all things but is still ***upholding the universe by the Word of His power***. He is superior to the angels, and is worshipped and served by them. His throne is forever and ever, and though all creation perish, He will remain. And though creation is constantly changing, He remains the same. Steadfast, reliable, constant, faithful.

That one - that one of whom all that is true! - has now come in your human flesh and blood, has come in lowliness and weakness, has come in humility and poverty, to serve and to save YOU.

And that really is the wonder of Christmas. That the Creator has come to serve the creatures, when we all know it should be the other way around. But this is the glory of God: **that He is not like us**. That creating in love, He comes in love, and dies in love. So when John says that ***we have seen His glory***, this is what He means. **<u>This</u> is what glory looks like**. Which we need to know in this world where we get glory all wrong. Where we chase after a glory that does not last. *<u>This</u>* is what glory looks like. True glory. Godly glory.

That . . . It is the glory of God <u>not</u> to stay in heaven, in power, but to be born as a man, and to be wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

It is the glory of God <u>not</u> to sit above everything that is happening, but to come and be obedient to His parents, and to be baptized as we are.

It is the glory of God <u>not</u> to separate Himself from us, but to eat with tax collectors and sinners and to touch lepers and those unclean with all kinds of diseases.

It is the glory of God <u>not</u> to flex His high and mighty muscles, but to allow those to whom He has given authority to use that authority against Him, arrest Him, flog Him, and then crucify Him.

All these things that we consider <u>un</u>glorious, **are His glory**. All these things do not diminish Him, but exalt Him and add to the wonder of His love.

Luther once wrote about what a wonder it would be if the son of a wealthy king left his throne and went to the ghettos to serve the poor and diseased, the filthy and disgusting. It would be all over the press as people wondered at and tried to understand such mercy. Well, Luther said, that's *almost* what the Son of the Most High has done for us. Except the Son of God left a **far greater throne** and came to serve **far worse people**. And that's the glory of this day.

That's why the angels sang as they did, as we heard in the Scriptures last night: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men* (Luke 2:14). Glory to the God who, as Isaiah said, rolled up His sleeves, ***bared His holy arm***, and got to work for us. Work that culminated with His ascending a mountain outside of Jerusalem and the glory of being the Son laid on the altar - the altar of the cross, where the Father offered up His Son and the Son laid down His life for the life of the world.

But not just the life of *the world* . . . for *your* life. He did this all *for you*. For Jackie, for Tim, for Grace, for Caleb, yes, for **all** of you, but also for **each** of you.

It is said that people who have a near death experience often change their life and how they live. If you've dodged a bullet or been given a second chance, you get to do things differently.

And so it is with you and me. Except we haven't just had a *near* death experience - we were *actually dead in our trespasses and sins* (Ephesians 2:1) and condemned for eternity, were it not for Jesus coming to save us. Coming to give us life again.

So how are you now living that life? In gratitude or with an attitude of entitlement? Bringing peace or causing division? Serving or demanding? Giving or taking? Joyful or resentful? If you're like me, it's a bit of all of that. Some good, some bad, some ugly. Okay, a LOT ugly!

So what's a God to do? A God who did all this for us, starting with His birth that we celebrate today . . . and then we . . . we live as if He didn't?

Well, **He lays Himself on the altar for us**. Just as the picture on the cover of the bulletin depicts today. He did so *then*, and He does so *now*. He lay in a manger of hay then, and He lies in a manger of bread and wine on this altar here today, to forgive our bad and all our ugly and work some good in us. That, as John said, ***we who receive Him here, who believe in His name, have the right to become children of God, being born not of blood or the will of the flesh nor the will of man, but of God***. And thus born of God and here fed by God, when he says there that we have *the right*, it means that we are authorized, we are empowered to be and live as the children of God we are.

But *what does that mean?* To live like that? Well, look no farther than Jesus. It means we get to live like Him now. That we have been set free to be glorious as He is glorious. Not chasing the glory of the world, but with the greater glory of God. The glory of serving, loving, mercying, and laying down our lives for others. Showing ourselves to be children of a God like that. Like Father, so His sons and daughters. For ***the Word*** not only ***became flesh and dwelt* among *us***, He is dwelling *in* us with His life and light. Destroying the work of the devil *in* us and *through* us.

That's what the Word made flesh has come to do. His coming is not just a thing of **the past**, an historical event to be remembered, and not just a thing of **the future**, with no real relevance to our life here and now, but **a present reality**. For the Word who was made flesh, *still is*. He didn't shed our flesh when He was done with it and return to some pristine, godly state. That this being a man was just a temporary

thing and something to get over as quickly as He could. No! This is who Jesus is. With His birth, and now, and forever. He is *true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary* (Small Catechism). He is your blood brother, your flesh brother, and it is not beneath Him to be so. **It is His glory**. His glory that we celebrate this day.

And that glory is what we're going to sing of now. It is a hymn some might say is not very Christmassy, like the kind that are most known and loved. They're good, *but this one is better*. You need to pay attention to the words, though. That's where the joy is. It's a hymn that fits perfectly the picture on the cover of the bulletin today, of a baby Jesus on the altar and His glory. Listen to how it talks about Jesus and all that He has done for us, and then come to His altar where He lay today, and receive it. Receive Him. And the glory of His love, His forgiveness, and His life, *for you*.

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