

21 December 2025
Advent 4 and Saint Thomas, Apostle

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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"I Got This"

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

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

Mary was with child. It wasn't his. That might have been the darkest day of Joseph's life, the day he found that out. *Why God? What had he done to deserve this?* He had been betrayed. But Joseph was a good guy; a just man, according to Matthew. So he wouldn't shame her; make her a public spectacle. He would divorce her quietly.

But before he could, *a light shone into his darkness*. The light of God's Word brought by an angel. Things were not as they seemed. Mary had not betrayed him. In fact, truth be told, it was the very opposite. Mary had *faithfully* submitted her will to the will of God and the child in her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This was no son of man, but the very Son of God, now incarnate in human flesh. So do not be afraid to take her as your wife, Joseph. This child is Jesus, who will save His people - who will save you! - from your sins.

And by the light that scattered Joseph's darkness, he did so. He took Mary as his wife and became the guardian of Jesus. And to the question: *Why God? What had he done to deserve this?* As it turns out, this honor . . . The answer: **nothing**. It was by grace. All by grace.

Now fast forward some 33 years, to another dark day. The day Saint Thomas saw his Lord die on the cross. Today is his day of commemoration in the church, as you see on the bulletin cover and as you heard in the second collect we prayed today. That Friday might have been the darkest day of his life, followed by the darkest *week* of his life - a week filled with doubt, fear, and confusion. He saw his Lord die; he couldn't be alive. He saw his Lord die! *Why God? Why?* Like Joseph, Thomas needed a light to shine into his darkness, to scatter the darkness that had filled his heart and soul.

And like Joseph, the light of God's Word did. After eight days of darkness, Jesus appeared to Thomas. Alive. Flesh and blood Jesus. The same flesh and blood Jesus that Joseph had once held in his arms as a seven or eight pound baby, Thomas was now invited to touch with his own hands. Like with Joseph, the truth was the very

opposite of what he first thought. Jesus was not dead, but very much alive.

But it wasn't only that, I don't think, that rescued Thomas from the deep darkness. **It was the Word of God spoken to him by Jesus.** *Gracious* words that didn't condemn Thomas - as his own unbelieving heart surely did! - but shone upon him and raised him to new life and hope. And to his question: *Why God?* Just like with Joseph, the answer: **grace.** Jesus' death, like His life, was God's grace in action.

These two men, Joseph and Thomas, who probably never met, who knew Jesus at the opposite ends of His life, who both endured days of deep darkness, are linked on this day this year, December 21st. Which is very appropriate, I think, for these two men who endured deep darkness, since as the first day of winter today is the darkest day of the year. The day with the least amount of daylight.

From now on, the days will begin to get longer, we'll start getting more and more light now. But really, that's not the light we need, when our lives are filled with darkness and doubt, betrayal and fear, sin and death. When we find ourselves thrust into confusing and distressing situations like Joseph and Thomas. What we need is *the same light* that scattered the darkness for Joseph and Thomas: the light of God's Word, His gracious words and promises. His Word which, as the psalmist tells us, *is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path* (Psalm 119:105).

Because at just such times, when we are thrust into confusing and distressing situations, we have to decide what we're going to do; how we're going to live. We need direction. We need guidance. And *better* direction and guidance than what's on the internet or what ChatGPT will tell us, or what the guy in the next cubicle or the girl at the desk next to you may say. Direction and guidance that *might be quite challenging* and even *against* what we were thinking of doing and *want* to do. Because that's how God's Word is. Against what our sinful nature comes up with.

For what are *our* thoughts, the thoughts of our sinful nature, going to come up with? **Sin.** Just as apple tree grow apples, sinful natures produce sins. But the Word that *is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path* is going to show me a different way. Instead of getting revenge, forgive. Instead of hurting, help. Instead of being self-righteous, know that I'm unrighteous. Instead of demanding, give. Instead of covering up my sin, confess it. Instead of cutting and running, commit. To know that where God has put you, at this time and this place, is by grace, and for a reason - to be a blessing, His blessing, to others. Which might not be easy. Which might mean sacrifice. And it might be exactly what not only *others* need, but what you need. Just as with Joseph and Thomas - God's grace to you. *Even if it doesn't feel like it.*

Now, that's the light we need, but it might not be the light we're using. Joseph

had his own thoughts about how to get out of his darkness, until the Word of God scattered the darkness and showed him another way. Thomas was stewing and wallowing in his darkness, until Jesus' gracious words scattered the darkness and lit the way out for him. And as I mentioned last week, this holiday season can (for the moment) *cover* the darkness in our lives with its lights and happiness and good feelings, but it doesn't *scatter* the darkness - instead, the darkness often comes roaring back with a vengeance. We need more than that. More than what the world can give and offer us. We need something that will last, something we can be sure of, something to rely on *and hang our life on*. And there's only one thing that can do that for us. The same light that scattered the darkness of Joseph and Thomas: the Word of God.

And so it was for Joseph. Instead of divorcing Mary quietly, he took her to be his wife. Which wasn't easy, and (as we'll hear next Sunday) resulted in him having to flee to Egypt at night, to live in a strange country with a strange language and a strange culture and false gods *to protect a child that wasn't even his!* And Thomas, sources tell us, didn't have it easy either, traveling all the way to India to proclaim the Gospel of his not dead but risen Lord, which resulted in his being speared to death. And it was all by grace. Grace which didn't make their lives *easier* . . . which is what I think we often assume - that God and His grace is going to make my life easier. Grace might mean bearing a cross. Like Jesus. **For bleeding and dying Jesus is God's grace in action.** To save you.

So maybe a cross is exactly what you need. Not what you want! No one *wants* to bear a cross! But exactly what you need. That instead of trying to make sense of things ourselves or do what *we* think good and best and right, we turn to the Word of God for the direction and guidance we need. Which is both to repent and what leads us to repentance.

And that leads us to grace. Grace upon grace. Grace that answers repentance with forgiveness. Grace which doesn't condemn, but which points to the cross and says: *I was condemned for you*. Grace poured out upon us in Baptism, and placed into our mouths in the Supper. Grace which says: *I got this* . . . even through all the times in the Bible and in history where it didn't seem like God "got this" at all! But the baby in the manger, born of a virgin, was God's *I got this*. The man hanging on the cross was God's *I got this*. And the empty tomb, especially, was God's *I got this*. And Baptism, and the Absolution, and the Supper are God's *I got you*. Even when the darkness is deepest. For as the psalmist also tell us: *Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you* (Psalm 139:12).

So maybe, just maybe, instead of what we usually do, telling God *I got this* . . . maybe we should hear that Word of God that *is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*, that

is God telling us: No. *I* got this. And then raised to life, forgiven our sins, and strengthened by His grace and Spirit, follow where He leads. Even if it is to Egypt or India or someplace less exotic, but a place no less challenging for you.

So as we come to the end of this Advent season in just a couple of days now and celebrate one of the fulfillments of Advent, the *first* coming of God, in the flesh, it is good to remember that, as we've been singing in our midweek Evening Prayer services,

*Jesus Christ is the light of the world,
the Light no darkness can overcome.*

And then our prayer,

*Let Your light scatter the darkness
and illumine Your Church* (LSB p. 243).

Yes, illumine Your Church and enlighten our hearts with the light of Your Word. So that as with Joseph and Thomas, the darkness not overcome us. Oh, it will try! You know that! You know the attacks. And the temptations. And if we were on our own, it *would* overcome us. It would. But you are not on your own. You are not *your own*! You were bought with a price - not with gold or silver, but with the holy precious blood and the innocent suffering and death of the Son of God. And living in Him and He in you, the darkness is scattered and there is light, to walk in the way of God, of holiness and righteousness.

Which is what Joseph did. You know, we often say *like father, like son*. But with Joseph and Jesus, it is really more *like son, like father*! What the Son of God was doing for Joseph, **Joseph was now doing for him**. Joseph had to change his son's dirty diapers, but by Jesus we are washed clean from the filth of our sin. Joseph had to feed his son, but by Jesus we are fed with His own Body and Blood. Joseph held and warmed his son, but by Jesus we are held and warmed by His forgiveness. All by grace. Grace upon grace.

Which is what we now do for others, as we follow His way and His Word which *is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*. Not because they deserve it. They probably don't! **But grace. Grace upon grace**. Which is the best Christmas gift we could ever **receive**, and the best Christmas gift we could ever **give**. Purchased and wrapped in the blood of Jesus. Who got this. For you. And for all.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.