

25 December 2025  
The Nativity of Our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“The Gift We Need”

Text: Hebrews 1:1-12; Isaiah 52:7-10; John 1:1-14

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

***Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.***

That’s what we heard in the reading from Hebrews this morning. And you know the names: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, and many more. But what you may *not* know is what God said ***at many times and in many ways*** through those prophets. Those books of the Old Testament are long and maybe a bit hard to understand. So let me tell you. Because basically, through them, God said two things . . .

First, that the people were making the same mistake as Adam and Eve.

Now, *what was that?* That they were doing what they weren’t supposed to do? Yes . . . but I’m not sure that’s the best way to look at it; at what we call sin. Because that just makes God sound like the grumpy old man in heaven yelling at us to stay off His lawn. And if we *don’t* turn the sprinkler on, or for God, turn the fires of hell on, to get us. And who wants a God like that?

No, Adam and Eve’s *real* problem wasn’t just what they *did* . . . it was *why*. It was that **they were looking for life where it cannot be found**. That’s the *real* essence of sin, and something I think we can relate to and see in our world today. All of us, I think, want to live a good life, a full life, a happy life . . . *but where do I find such a life?* Where do I find fulfillment, meaning, purpose, value, love? We look for it in people, and then they let us down. We look for it in the things we have, we possess, and then they just wind up possessing us. We look for it in activities we pour ourselves into, trying to be successful (whatever that means), but we’re pouring ourselves *out* rather than being *filled*, and there’s always more to give, more that is demanded, until we’re empty and have no more to give. And the world then just moves on to someone else. And maybe we look for it in holidays, but then the calendar page turns and we’re back to the same old life and problems.

And then where does that leave us? Adrift, lost, hurt, searching, afraid, alone. And

dead. Maybe not on the outside, but *inside*.

You see, that's the *real* essence - and danger - of sin that God spoke through the prophets. It's not really how we usually think of it, as being good or bad, of whether or not we're on God's naughty or nice list. God told Adam and Eve *this tree gives life*, and I give it to you, that you may life and have it in abundance. And they said, *well . . . uh . . . no thanks*. We'll eat from this tree instead. Because we heard this one will give us real life! So they did. And they died. And people have been dying ever since. We're dying to live! But instead, many are just dying.

So the prophets were pointing out this reality, a reality that the people kinda, sorta, already knew. That their search wasn't working. Maybe your search isn't working. The results just aren't there.

But through the prophets, God was saying something else, too. The second thing God said ***at many times and in many ways***, and that was that He was fulfilling the promise He made to Adam and Eve and to the world. He didn't forget. He didn't change his mind. He said He would fix this, and that day was coming. And with each passing year, each passing prophet, details emerged, more information was given, the pieces started coming together, until there would be no more prophets. Until . . .

***. . . in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.***

Until the day God roared and shouted and raised His voice for all the world to hear! But it wasn't the thunderous chorus of the angels that we heard about last night. It wasn't a shot heard round the world, but the *birth* heard round the world. Not a day that will live in infamy, but the day when life - *real* life, *pure* life - entered the world again. To give life again - *real* life, *pure* life. The day when, as Isaiah said, God ***bared his holy arm*** - that is, when He rolled up His sleeves and got to work. The day when, as John put it, His Son, ***the Word, became flesh***.

**Nothing had ever, has ever, or will ever speak louder or clearer than that.**

*For who was this Word become flesh?* This baby in the manger? The one at the center of our Nativity scenes? We're so used to saying it that I think maybe we lose our appreciation for this, what happened here. But the words used in the verses from Hebrews we heard today are really quite astounding . . .

First, we are told, He is ***the heir of all things*** - that is, the one to whom *everything* belongs. There's *nothing* that's not His . . . *except you*, when you go to look for life in someone, something, some place else. So the one to whom everything belongs, ***the heir of all things***, left it all - left everything! - *for you*. To come and provide and give

life to you, that you be His and with Him forever. **That you have not just a life that ends in death, but a death that ends in life.**

Then we heard He is the one ***through whom all things were created***. The one bigger than all the universes put together - the extent of which we are still discovering and probably will never fully realize . . . The one to whom everything belongs because He created it all, **that one**, He is now a tiny baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. *For you.*

The author of Hebrews then goes on to say that He is ***the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature***. Or as we say in the Creed, He is *God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God*. The one who is so gloriously, brilliantly bright that neither we nor the angels can stand to look at Him anymore than we can look at the sun . . . That one, He is now wrapped in human flesh so you can look at Him and behold Him and His love *for you*.

And then one more . . . He is the one who ***upholds the universe by the word of his power***. Which means keeping the planets in their orbits, the stars in their place, feeding the animals and the birds, and protecting us . . . the Commander of the angel host . . . That one, He is now here, like this, *for you*.

It's pretty amazing, that God would do that for us. Give His Son like that for us. When what we deserved was not coal in our spiritual stocking but the burning coals of hell in our present and future! Instead, a Saviour was born.

**That's why this birth speaks so loudly.**

Or as John so simply put it: ***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

*Glory, grace, and truth*. That's what's lying in the manger this day, not just a baby. The glory of God, that He would do this for us. The grace of God, giving us what we in no way deserved. And the truth of God, that every Word He speaks, every promise He makes, is and will be fulfilled. It is truth. That even after Adam and Eve threw away the life He gave them and chose death instead, and even after people ever since - including us! - have done the same . . . God didn't, wouldn't turn his back to us; He didn't, wouldn't change His mind. He came to us, was born for us, to save us. Or as we heard, to make ***purification for sins***.

Now we often call that purification *forgiveness*, and rightly so. Jesus died on the cross for us, to purify us from our sins with His forgiveness. Truth. But today, let's

think about it a little differently, and call it something else: resurrection. For ***after making purification for sins, he*** rose from death and ***sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high***. What *started* in the manger, but didn't stay there. But from manger to cross to the right hand of God, Jesus is doing the same thing: giving us life. A new life to live.

And like with Adam and Eve, He is telling us: *here is life*. Here is where you find it. IN ME. And here is where I am for you. *Of the Father's Love Begotten* (LSB #384). Don't look anywhere else. You will not, cannot find it anywhere else. Here is My love, My light, My life, My forgiveness, My grace - all here for you. Be washed, be cleansed, take eat, take drink, follow Me to life. I will not let you down.

Which is exactly what we need. Not just life (though we do!), but *someone who will not let us down*, in a world filled with people who let us down, and people and things that die, and when everything in our lives goes awry. Someone who keeps His word, loves unceasingly and undeservedly, and is always here for us. So that we have hope. A hope that will last.

So while ***long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets***, today, something else is happening. ***In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son***, the baby in the manger, calling to you and calling you to hope and faith in Him. That you know the love God that surpasses all that we can imagine, **and have His life that is the same: unimaginable**. And with that, have the joy of the angels and the joy of which we sing this season. But not only for this season, but for a lifetime . . . and beyond. That's what God wants you to have. For He's not a grumpy old man, but a gift-giving God. Giving life, giving hope, giving joy, giving love. Giving His Son. *For you*.

For ***the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth***.

Maybe that wasn't a gift that made it onto your list, but it is the *exact* gift we need.

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