

Sermon for Christmas Eve

Date: December 24, 2020 (3:30pm)

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 52:7-10

Epistle Reading: Hebrews 1:1-6

Gospel Reading: John 1:1-14

Sermon Text: John 1:1-14

Sermon Title: Jesus: The First Fruits of Jesse's Tree



Hymns:

LSB 379 – O Come, All Ye Faithful

LSB 367 – Angels from the Realms of Glory

LSB 368 – Angels We Have Heard on High

LSB 380 – Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

LSB 383 – A Great and Mighty Wonder

LSB 363 – Silent Night, Holy Night

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: John 1:1–14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

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.

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Grace, mercy and peace, from the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

I would imagine that the first Christmas was a night like many others. Around the world, people were busy doing whatever it was that defined their lives at that moment. For some, it was struggling against hunger, fear, and desperation. For others, it was enjoying their wealth and ease. For yet others, it was simply dealing with the pressures of their lives. For all, that first Christmas was just another night lived in darkness.

It is indeed a dark world. God had created the world so we could live in peace with Him. He had breathed life into the father of our race, Adam. He had formed Eve from the side of Adam and had joined the two together and to Himself. How bright the world must have been as Eden lived in harmony with the Creator.

Then darkness came. Those created and loved by God rebelled against Him, bringing a darkness that permeated all of creation. Death had entered all that Lord of Life and made. It entered through sin, and as the children of Adam filled the world, they took with them the darkness of that dreadful day in Eden when sin and death entered the world.

Years past. Thousands of years. Until a day came. A day in Bethlehem. It was a world of darkness cut off from the source of all light, the Creator Himself. Yet a light was breaking into the world. A young girl carried in her virgin womb a Son. This daughter of Eve was about to give birth to the One who would be the Light of the world. This infant Child would reverse forever the horror of humanity's fall into sin and introduction to death and darkness. This was the miracle of miracles: our human sister Mary became, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the bearer of the Savior of the world.

The promise was passed from Eden, to Abraham, to an obscure daughter of Jesse. The opening verses of the Gospel of John are among the greatest, and most familiar, verses of the Bible, or of any literature ever written, for that matter. In soaring oratory, the evangelist brings heavenly truth and majesty into human words falling on human ears, and the heavenly Lord into human sight. The One of whom John writes is not only the subject of these words but the Author of all things.

The record of Jesus does not begin with Mary or Joseph or the shepherds, or the Magi from the East. It begins before the creation of the world, before the words, "Let there be Light" were uttered to the void. The record of Jesus begins in the eternity before, preceding the point at which time was created. John writes:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.¹

This is a “great and mighty wonder.” The Creator, the Word of God, now joins Himself to His broken and scared creation to redeem all of us.

This was the promise of God from the beginning. From Eden. From the day in which human sin shattered the perfection of Eden. This was the promise brought through the lives of patriarchs and prophets, and kings, through a humble man named Jesse and the tree that would sprout through his son David, one golden thread unites us all. History may change. Circumstances may change, but God’s eternal promise does not. This day, this blessed Festival of the Nativity of Our Lord, this Holy Christmas, we see the Descendant of Jesse, the Virgin Mary, bringing into the world a Baby who will change the universe.

The prophets of God had foretold of this glorious day, this day of the birth of the Christ Child. Yet those who read the prophets still did not understand, or see the presence of the fulfillment of the prophetic word. John tells us:

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.²

God has not chosen visibly great and mighty people to work His great and mighty acts. He has chosen that which is humble and hidden to human eyes. So it was that His fulfillment of all things came through a peasant girl giving birth in a stable. Here was the Babe, hidden in the tree of Jesse. The seed, the root, the trunk, who had now come as the fruit of that same tree.

So it was in Bethlehem so many years ago, and still is today. Humanity lives in a world that seems to be defined not by life, but by death. The sanctity of life is denied. People die in the news every day. Nation rises against nation as humanity finds new and more effective ways to wage a deadly scourge against each other. Drive past a cemetery and you can see, the day will come when our own earthly bodies will be placed in a grave. Death is a darkness that permeates all of human history and it will permeate our own personal future history as well.

1 John 1:1–3

2 John 1:10–11

It is into that grim reality of death that the words of John ring out with a hope and certainty that defies the power of death itself. This Word of God made flesh, who created all things also changes all things!

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.³

We do live in a dark world. All of us have sinned and all of us deserve not only earthly death but eternal death. Yet the Creator:

... so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.⁴

God so loves us that He has taken the darkness and destroyed it with His own light. Where His Light is, life reigns eternal.

The promise was passed from Adam to Abraham, to Jesse, to you. The tradition of the Jesse Tree celebrates God's promises throughout human history, promises that are more sure and more certain than anything our eyes might conceive or our minds envision. The world, the devil, and our own sinful flesh would have us look inward for an answer to the darkness that surrounds us and fills us. So it was for Adam and Eve, for the patriarchs, for Jesse. Yet all we find there is more darkness and hopelessness. We need God's own Light to break into our darkness and change eternal night to eternal day. In Jesus, the Light of the world, God has given us that blessed light! Oh, that we would learn and remember this great truth:

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.⁵

No human eye could perceive it that night. All that could be seen was a Child. Yet this Child would forever destroy the darkness. With Him He brought life into death, and His light was to be the light of the world. Every force of Satan would seek to put that light out. Herod would attempt to destroy Him by killing every male infant. Scribes and Pharisees would seek to silence Him as He spoke words of life. Failing to silence Him, they would seek to kill Him. In due time the Babe of Bethlehem would be nailed to a cross.

3 John 1:4-5

4 John 3:16-17

5 John 1:14

Satan thought he had won, not realizing this is precisely what He had come to do. He had come to die. The real reason for the season is about a Baby who had been born to die, but more than that. Not just to die, but to be placed in the utter darkness of a Hell. Then on Easter morning to burst from that tomb alive and victorious. When the Child of Mary rose from the grave, the light that began at Bethlehem now shines forever, so brightly no one can put it out.

That light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. It shines as the Babe of Bethlehem fills our lives with Himself. It shines with a brilliance perceived only by eyes of faith that gaze on the Baptismal font and the Sacred Meal at the altar. It shines on you, this Christmas Eve, and tomorrow, and on into eternity.

This is most certainly true.

Amen.

Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people

