

Roslyn. December 25, 2016. The Incarnation of Our Lord

Grace and peace to you, people of God in Christ Jesus at Living Word Lutheran Church!

The great Christmas proclamation, which has its roots in the ancient practices of the church's worship, begins Christmas Eve worship with the words "when ages beyond number had run their course from the creation of the world" and moves through all the many and various ways God has chosen to participate in history, culminating in the irruption of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, into history—and now "in even our own time." This proclamation plants God's work in time, in our time, and makes the mystery of the incarnation something that we can better grasp.

We Lutherans speak often of God's grace toward us in Jesus Christ—the atonement of our sins on the cross—as a gift. But that gift is not merely something that happens in Jerusalem at Easter. It is something that begins even in Bethlehem on Christmas. The gift of God's salvation begins giving, if you will, with the birth of Jesus, the Christ, the holy Son of God, our Lord.

But when we look at who Jesus is, when we really step back and look at what kind of gift we are getting, we can hardly say that it is the gift that we want. We, like the Jewish people of Jesus' time, can look around our world and ask ourselves what all this can mean—war and talk of war, intrigue and accusations of machination. And in our own, personal lives—strife and estrangement, doubts and uncertainty, disease and death. If only God would come down from heaven, then things would be different...

But God has come down from heaven. For us and for our salvation, Jesus Christ became incarnate of the Virgin Mary and was made man, true God from true God. But when we look at Jesus, we see a helpless child when we want a glorious king or general, a great prophet or a healer. We want God to send angel legions to undo the wrong in this world and bring in peace. Instead, we get a small child who will grow up and suffer like we do...and even die. Nails, spear shall pierce him through. This is not the gift we want, but the gift we need.

We need this gift of Jesus Christ because it is the gift that is precisely the opposite of what this world is offering. This world promises success in might, and God comes to us as a helpless infant and even dies—and not just any death, but a violent, criminal's death. Instead of crushing this world's wrongs with power, God reveals to the just how backward the ways of the world are. God shows us a different way in Jesus Christ—the way of grace and truth, of humility and peace.

There is no question that our world needs to head in a different direction than the one we are currently going. Our churches need reformation now as much as they did in October 1517 when Martin Luther published his Ninety-Five Theses, or when the Holy Spirit first descended on the apostles after Christ's resurrection, or when God chose to enter human history as a child. We need God's continual work in our lives to bring about that changes that we so long for—because that work is truly God's work, done with our hands. The work of Reformation is done by God through us. That is the work of Christmas, the work of Easter, the work of Pentecost is done by God through us.

God gives us the gift of relationship with him through Jesus Christ and makes it alive through the outpouring of Power through the Holy Spirit. When we unwrap that gift, when we recognize that relationship as a promise fulfilled, how can we help but live our lives differently? How can we help but be instruments of God's peace in the world and in the lives of our family and friends? The coming of God this Christmas, the incarnation of our Lord, happens anew in our own time, in our own lives, and in us.

We have received a great gift from God—it might not be the gift we want, but it is the gift we need. It is the gift the world needs. It is the gift of salvation and reconciliation to God and to one another. Ours is the charge to share that gift with the world so desperately in need of compassion and mercy, humility and grace.

May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Yours in Christ our Lord,

Pr. Daniel W. Spigelmyer, Jr.