

“God Approaches in Our own Flesh”

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Advent 2021; December 19, 2021

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

Rev. Charles Westby, Pastor

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Christmas is nearly upon us. In a few days we will gather to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. In Jesus, God the Son took on human flesh and was born as a little baby. In this God defied all human expectation. He defied what humans think is possible. But why? Why did God do this?

One of the reasons why is found in the Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy 18. There the LORD had told Moses the following: “I will raise up for them [that is the people of Israel] a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him” (Deut. 18:18-19 ESV).

Here God promises a special Prophet, who will speak His word and reveal God in a very special and unique way. There was a reason God promised this Prophet. It was because of what the people had said to Moses about God when they were gathered at the mountain in the wilderness of Sinai, where God gave the Law. They said, “Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die” (Deut. 18:16 ESV).

Here is the back story. It was three months since the People of Israel had gone through the Red Sea on dry ground, a wall of water on their right and a wall of water on their left (Ex. 14:22). They came to the mountain in the Wilderness of Sinai (Ex. 19:1). There God met Moses and gave him the Law, the Ten Commandments. The whole episode was engulfed in fear.

On morning of the third day God descended on the Mountain. There was thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud. There was the sound of a trumpet that sounded long and very loud. The mountain was completely engulfed in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire. The smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked. The sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then God answered Moses by voice (Ex. 19:16-19).

The people saw all of this. They trembled and stood far off. They were terrified and did not want to come near God. God was manifesting His presence in holiness, power, and glory. He was manifesting Himself in a way that did not suggest peace and safety. It was terrifying for the human being corrupted by sin. What does God intend to do to us? What if I do something that is contrary to God’s will?

So the people spoke to Moses that day and said: “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die” (Ex. 20:19).

Now we come back to Deuteronomy 18 and the promise of the special Prophet. God thought that what the people had said to Moses at Mount Sinai was good. It was good because it anticipated the way God wanted to come to them in the way of peace; in the way that would be true comfort and consolation for the sinner. And so with this promise of the Prophet, God was giving a promise of the good news of Jesus’ birth.

There are a couple of important things about this special Prophet that foreshadow and promise the good news of Jesus. This Prophet will arise from among the people. He will be in their midst. He will be among them, standing next to them, shoulder to shoulder. God will come near to them in this Prophet, concealed in human flesh, and they will live.

This Prophet will be one of their own kind, one of their brothers. He will be human just like them. And as one of them, He will speak God's word to the people. He will reveal God's will and God's way of salvation as one of them: "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

Because God promised to do something utterly special and unique in this Prophet, God also impressed upon the people to listen to Him: "And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him" (Deut. 18:18-19 ESV). So a Messianic expectation became attached to this promise of the Prophet. This is why the priests and levities that had come down from Jerusalem to find out who John the Baptist was asked him if he was the Prophet (John 1:21). This is why the people of Israel thought Jesus was the Prophet after He had fed the 5000. They said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14 NKJV).

So we come to Christmas. At Christmas the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word that was with God from eternity and was God from eternity became flesh. He became our brother. He had God's word in His mouth because He was God the Son in human flesh. As God the Son, He spoke God's word out of His own person. As God the Son He spoke God's word with His own human mouth. He was the true and unique Prophet, indeed.

He came among us human beings to stand with us shoulder to shoulder. He came as our brother. The power of God in His glory that is a terror to sinners was hidden behind His flesh. Now He draws near to us, and we draw near to God in Him. For those seek to be right with God, He accomplishes forgiveness and speaks peace. For the proud, who think they can stand in God's holy presence under the Law, He speaks warning and chastises hypocrisy and hardness of heart.

But at Christmas, we see the fulfillment of God's promise of the Prophet who would bring God to us in human flesh as our brother.

So in anticipation of our Christmas celebration, we sing with Mary, the mother of our Lord:

"God has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
 He has brought down the mighty from their thrones
 and exalted those of humble estate;
 He has filled the hungry with good things,
 and the rich he has sent away empty.
 He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy.
 (Luke 1:51-54).

Now God's strength is shown in doing the miracle of grace and mercy. The proud, those who think they know what God could possibly do, God will scatter in the thoughts of their hearts. "The virgin shall conceive," God said. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. But here God's strength is the manifestation of His mercy as God approaches us in Jesus in what is a profound humility for God, becoming our brother. And this mercy will be shown in an even greater wonder. Jesus as this Prophet, as our brother, will die our death before God in redeeming sacrifice to cover our sin by His blood.

So as Christmas comes once again, we can also sing with Mary: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46). For look what God has done for us in Jesus, His Son. Amen.