

MIDWEEK ADVENT II

“Jesus Comes”

The first coming of Jesus is hard for us to imagine. It happened so long ago in a place so far away with a life so different from ours today. Yet every year at this time we are touched by the familiar story of Jesus' birth. But the temptation is for us to think of it as only that, a story; one that is nice to hear, one that we enjoy passing on to our children and hearing about in children's Christmas services, but that has no real meaning for our every day lives now.

That would be true if the coming of Jesus were limited to a 30-year time period 2000 years ago in out of the way places called Galilee & Judea. So Jesus came to this world, looked around, made some profound statements, told some interesting stories, worked some amazing miracles and then went back to heaven. Now life goes on as normal for us.

But Jesus' coming into this world is not just limited to the past. He promised His first followers that He would be with us always. Jesus has given us ways of making Himself present among us continually in our time. Just as God fulfilled His ancient promise of a Savior by sending His eternal Son into the world at Christmas, Jesus fulfills the promise of His presence by regularly being among us through His Word and Sacraments.

Jesus' promise of His presence that He made to His disciples in what we call the Great Commission of Matthew 28 is inseparably connected to Holy Baptism. “Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” In joyful obedience to Jesus' words the Christian Church always has practiced and cherished Holy Baptism. Baptism is when and where God claims us to be His own children, snatching us from the grasp of the devil. Baptism is when and where the saving work of Jesus Christ becomes His eternal gift to us. Baptism is when and where the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, making His dwelling within us and giving us the power to live lives pleasing to our Triune God. Whenever we witness a baptism take place in worship we are to rejoice that Jesus is coming into the life of another person. Whenever we remember our own baptism, as we should do daily, saying “I am God's child, saved from my sins,” we can rejoice that Jesus still comes into our lives.

And Jesus also said, “teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you and I will be with you always.” The promise of Jesus' presence among us now also is fulfilled in the written Word of God, the Holy Bible. This is God's

revealed message of our salvation which He inspired human authors to write. Through this Word of the Bible we hear the voice of Jesus proclaiming the forgiveness of our sins and promising us a place in paradise with Him.

It is a great blessing to have God's Word so handy for us. That has not always been the case for God's people in the past. God's Word in their own language is not easily available to many Christians in the world today. It is important for us not to take this blessing of God for granted. As we read and study the Bible, either alone, with our family or in a class group, Jesus is present among us. Through that written Word of God Jesus still comes to us. By this means of God's grace the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith in Jesus as He continues to confirm us as His disciples.

While having Jesus present among us in our baptism and through the Bible is very comforting, we may want something more, something we can see and touch. We want some presence of Jesus with us that is more concrete in nature. "Oh, if Jesus were only physically present with us, that would be so much better, I would believe in Him more."

Jesus has taken care of this for us also. When celebrating one last Passover meal with His disciples Jesus gave them bread and said, "This is My body." Then He gave them wine and said, "This is My blood." Both of which Jesus gave them for the forgiveness of sins. The next day that bleeding body of Jesus hung upon the cross as He gave His life into death for us, innocently, sacrificially, for the forgiveness of our sins.

Since then Jesus' followers have continued to celebrate and cherish this meal, this supper that our Lord has given to us. We do so to remember His suffering and death for us. We do so also to receive God's forgiveness of our sins which Jesus won for us on the cross. We do so also looking ahead to His return and the heavenly banquet of all Jesus' followers around His eternal throne. In this Lord's Supper Jesus truly is present for us. The bread is His body. The wine is His blood. It is for us to take, to touch, and to taste. Gathered here at this altar we can be sure that through this Holy Communion Jesus still comes to us.

The coming of Jesus now is as real and personal as His first coming on earth so many centuries ago. As then, so also now, Jesus comes to fulfill a promise, His promise. Jesus comes to bring us His salvation. Jesus comes to make us His people. Jesus comes to be with us His people. In Jesus' Name. Amen.