

SERMON FOR SUN. DEC. 19, 2021

Advent 4C 2021 “My Soul Magnifies the Lord”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by and for Christ Jesus, today we heard from the inspired author of Hebrews: **“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired . . . in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.”**

But how can this be? How could the God who established the Tabernacle, the Temple, the Priesthood and the whole sacrificial system *not* desire these sacrifices and offerings, *nor* take pleasure in them?

Well, it is true because God is not a God of death but life. In the beginning, when God created the world, He did not create men or animals to die, but to live – to live together in harmony, and to enjoy the world and life that He had given.

God’s desire was that He would take pleasure in – *our* pleasure for He made this world for us. But you know the story. How man chose temptation instead of obedience, chaos instead of harmony, and death instead of life.

It *seemed* so insignificant – a piece of fruit, how bad could that be? But it was devastating – to the garden, to the man and woman, to all of creation, and to our relationship with God.

But that we might have hope, that we might not die in the sin we chose for ourselves; God gave the Law and the sacrificial system.

He had no pleasure in the killing of His creation, His beloved animals. But men and women, the crown of His creation, made in His image and likeness, needed this.

For each and every time an animal was slain, its blood spilled and splashed against the altar of God, we would remember – that should be *our* blood; that should be *me*, because I am the sinner.

That is the penalty for my sin. But that I might not die, but live, God is providing a substitute for me, that by faith in His goodness and promise, I am forgiven.

And that is why we rejoice today! The substitute, promised by God and foretold by prophets, the substitute that all those animals and blood foreshadowed, is born into our world.

So the Lamb of God was born among animals, and laid in a feed trough. For the very Son of God ***a body had been prepared***, from a virgin, born without the stain of sin, to be the perfect substitute.

And in Him, atonement is made for the sin of the world when dies the innocent for the guilty, the perfect for the sinner, the Creator for His

creatures. And that one so dying, entering death unjustly, defeat death and live again.

Life would again rule over death; sacrifices would no longer be needed; and that we who are held captive under sin and death, be set free from these tyrants and live, once and for all.

This is the birth the prophet Micah foresaw that would occur in the seemingly insignificant town of Bethlehem!

But Bethlehem is still remembered today for this is the place where the Son of God would come to earth, leaving His royal throne, and being found in the swaddling clothes of a newborn baby.

Jesus is born to be our *peacemaker*; to bring order out of the chaos of our sin, that we may once again dwell in harmony with God and men.

And so it came to pass. The angel Gabriel came armed with the Word and Spirit of God to a virgin in the little town of Nazareth. God had not forgotten His promise, spoken to Adam and Eve, to Abraham and David – but had now come to fulfill it.

For in God's plan of salvation it was the fullness of time. And a Savior was conceived. Just like you and I, but also *unlike* you and I. For Jesus is not only the son of man, but also the sinless Son of God.

And Mary was no mere mother but the blessed mother of God. Elizabeth and John knew it – John couldn't contain himself, but leapt for joy while still in Elizabeth's womb!

It was all happening. Not just a birth, but God's plan of life, of forgiveness, of salvation. The Lord doing great things for us!

And that is why we rejoice today! For if ***blessed is she who believed***, then also we are blessed when we believe.

For by faith His blessings are our blessings. ***Even in the midst of lives that may not look very blessed.***

For consider Mary. How was she blessed after the angel came to her? She had the challenge of telling the man to which she was engaged that she was pregnant but not unfaithful.

She had to live in a town where everyone would look at her as an adulteress.

She had to travel to Bethlehem while great with child and give birth outdoors because there was no room at the inn.

She had to flee to a foreign country to save the life of her child and then watch as those who hated her Son unjustly took His life by hanging Him on a cross.

And yet **all generations call her blessed**, for so she was.

And you, too, are blessed by grace through faith. Blessing comes in many shapes and sizes, in things as wonderful as childbirth and as challenging as death. Yet in all things, you are blessed in Christ Jesus for **you have been sanctified** (made holy) **through the offering of His body and blood once for all.**

And so in Holy Baptism, you are made holy as *the* substitute, Jesus, becomes *your* substitute.

In Holy Communion, you are made holy as *His* blood is splashed upon *your* lips and heart.

In Holy Absolution, you are made holy as *His* peace is declared to be *your* peace.

And so sanctified and blessed, there is nothing in this world that can separate you from His love and blessedness. God's will has been done.

And so just as God is well pleased with His Son, He is well pleased with you who've been joined to his Son in Baptism.

Like Mary, some of you will be find celebrating Christmas challenging this year for it will be for you the first Christmas without a loved one, feeling the sting of death.

And some of you will have other difficulties, joys, sorrows, and trials to face.

But in it all, we can sing with Mary: **"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant."**

Yes, He has looked on our humble estate for He who has promised is faithful. He who has claimed you as His own is true to His Word. He who sent his Son will never forsake you.

And He who **"has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever"** will also help you.

For God's desire and pleasure is not in your death, or in your struggles, but in your life.

And so He *came* and He *comes* to give you life. Not life as defined by the world, in the things and pleasures of this world, but life in Him. For life in Him is life eternal.

And so today we join Elizabeth is rejoicing in our Lord. Today we join John in leaping for joy. Today we join Mary in magnifying the Lord, because **"for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. AMEN**