

Grace Visible

Titus 2:11-14

The Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Midnight, December 24, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

One of the largest problems of dead sinners is that we cannot see God. We are blind to Him. We look upon His creation in all of its splendor and we do not see Him.

At various times and in many ways God manifested Himself of old to the prophets, but even then things were a bit vague. There was a burning bush, a hand writing on the wall, fire from heaven when called upon and a series of miracles that receive natural explanations on TV documentaries now and probably received similar explanations from the unbelievers back then.

God is not visible. When God is not visible how is a dead sinner supposed to see Him.

That is the celebration of this night.

We often say that God has been made into flesh and that is true. Many have said that we celebrate the incarnation this night and that is true. But in blessed technicality the incarnation had already taken place even before Christmas night. The incarnation had taken place nine months earlier when the angel Gabriel announced to the virgin Mary that she would have a son and she said let it be done to me as the Lord has said. The incarnation began as a zygote as all human beings do. Soon the cells began to divide in Mary's womb and there was what we call a fetus. God was a fetus at one time. He was a fetus where a fetus should not have been, but that is the way of things with God. After all we have a creation where it should not be and it is here.

The incarnation had already taken place, but as Psalm 139 points out such a place is a secret place, a hidden place. Until Mary begins to show God still has not appeared on the scene to the naked eye. It is when He is born that He appears. It is when He is born that God can be seen.

And not just God, but the grace of God.

And people will still deny that the child is God.

People will deny that Mary was a virgin when she had Jesus. People will deny the miraculous. They will stare into the face of the incarnate God and their sinful death will still get the best of them. But nevertheless, there He is.

This is not some burning bush that speaks. This is not some mysterious hand that writes. This is not the well timed miracle. This is the beginning of a flood of miracles unlike the world has ever seen. One miracle will tumble after another through our Lord's life all the way to His resurrection. And it all begins with a virgin giving birth.

The grace of God is now visible.

The prophets talked about the grace of God. They even announced the grace of God. Jesus is the grace of God. The grace of God is now going to show the full extent of His love and mercy. The grace of God is now visible. The grace of God is now human. This human will give Himself on our behalf to redeem us from every lawlessness. This human will purify for Himself a people of His own possession. This human in every act that He takes and in His culminating acts will make the grace of God visible. He will die to make the grace of God visible. He will return from death to make the grace of God visible. He begins this visibility with His own birth.

The child's appearance disciplines us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.

The problem with dead sinners is that we are blind to God. We cannot see Him. The problem is that our lack of sight does not preclude us from worshipping. We were made to worship God in the beginning. Our fall into sin and death has not changed that. We are still a worshipping creature. We will worship something. We cannot help but worship something. It is in our nature to worship something. There is no way to worship nothing. There is no way not to worship at all. We will worship. The question is always what we are worshipping.

We will look to something for rescue. We will look to something to help us with major life decisions. We will look to something or someone for our highest good. We will idolize someone or something. Our blindness to God keeps us from idolizing Him and so we go and idolize something else and when we do it becomes our god.

This is the godliness that the child in the manger trains us to deny. Since He makes God visible, He reveals who the real God is and once the real God is brought to light all of our false gods also stand identified. There they all are. There are all of the godless lusts for those things which we worshipped. Godless lusts simply identify that which we are worshipping. They point out to our conscience upon what we are truly relying for our highest good. When Jesus lies in the manger He makes it evident how many things in which we put our trust that are not Him. The reason that He makes it evident is because He is visible.

No more can God be found in a bottle of alcohol. No more can God be found in pornographic images. No more can God be found in our bank accounts. No more can God be found in our politics. No more can God be found in our grades or athletic or physical performance. No more can God be found in our achievements, awards, and anniversaries of anything. No more can God be found in the field or in the office. No more can God be found in one's wife or husband, parents or children. No more can God be found in that person of enough fame to have garnered our interest over the years. No more can God be found in the things of leisure or of nature. God can no longer be found in the addictive substances that we take. He is not in any of those places and we can see that He is not in any of those places. He is visible now and He is lying in the manger. Even the shepherds saw Him and all of their godlessness was disciplined. God is there, in the manger. Bow down to Him. Worship Him. Depend on Him. Rely on Him. He makes the grace of God visible.

His appearance grants us the wisdom lead just and godly lives in this present age.

His appearance reveals God. Therefore to worship at His manger is godly. Worshipping at His manger denies the idols that surround us in this present age. Worshipping Him puts Him in His right place and the idols in their right place. They are not saviors nor do they grant the grace of God. Idols are demanding task masters that demand sacrifices from you in exchange for very little that they do for you. When you worship at the manger, you are no longer looking to those idols after which you used to lust. They have their proper place now and it is not god. For some of them their proper place is moderation in accord with one's vocation. For others there is no use for them at all for they serve no useful purpose except perhaps in very extreme circumstances.

And Jesus is God. He makes the grace of God visible and by so doing moves our dependence onto Him. He is our highest good and by being so He denies any good to anything or anyone else. He gives you a unique place to worship Him so that it may be evident that you are not worshipping an idol. He bids you to worship Him at His manger. There is nothing there upon which to depend except Him.

His appearance grants us wisdom for the now time because He has gone invisible again. After He ascended into heaven our mortal blindness has taken over and we cannot see Him again. But now that

He has appeared, we know that He is capable of appearing. God is not by nature invisible. He is by nature glory. Jesus is the glory of God because Jesus makes God and His grace visible. Jesus in the manger tells us that God is a God who reveals Himself in visible ways.

Therefore it is no surprise that God reveals Himself in the sacrament of the altar. It is not surprise that God is visible in bread and wine. After all He was visible in the humble manger. Why not be visible at this humble altar that we have built? God became visible when Jesus was born. Why wouldn't God be visible in something simple like water administered in His name? We call it baptism. Why wouldn't that be a revelation of His grace if He says so? After all, He Himself is visible.

But if that is the case and the visible nature of Jesus is only manifested according to His promise, then there is one more thing that the Jesus lying in the manger points to. Jesus promised He would return again in glory. It will be a glory that even the unbelievers will not be able to deny in their TV documentaries. That glory will be visible. Then Jesus will be seen by all. How do we know that He will be seen when He returns in glory? Because He was seen the first time by shepherds when He was lying in the manger.

In view of the fact that Jesus was visible the first time and has released you from your idols, and in view the fact that He will return again in glory, why not do good works? Why not do acts of mercy and kindness to the poor and impoverished? Why not do acts of kindness and gentleness with your neighbors? Why not serve them above and beyond the call of duty? Why not? Why not do what your neighbor asks you to do if it serves his advantage? Why not be self-sacrificing to your neighbor as your Lord was?

When you are those things, then you too make God visible and the manger is manifested all over again in your life.

In the Name of Jesus. Merry Christmas.