

Advent 4

I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put my words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.

When Israel was gathered at Mt. Sinai (Horeb) God spoke to the whole assembly out of the cloud.

There, He gave them the 10 commandments from His own mouth.

After this terrifying experience, the people said to Moses, *“You speak with us and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”*

Having come close to the naked grandeur of God, they couldn't take it.

For God came to them in that day clothed—not with flesh and blood—but with fire and smoke.

As they said, *“Surely God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. . . who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?”*

And God said, *“I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken.”*

It is simply impossible for sinful flesh to stand before God and live.

For God is holy, and righteous—and cannot tolerate sin and uncleanness.

But what a terrible fate—to be banished from God's presence forever.

This is what we call hell—namely, the absence of God.

God is not willing to leave you in hell—without His presence, without His Word.

Therefore, in His mercy, He promised Moses: *“I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put my words in His mouth.”*

The problem of flesh coming into God's presence is met by God's coming into flesh, *“God will raise up a prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren, Him you shall hear.”*

John was not that Prophet—rather, his only job is to point out the arrival of that Prophet and to prepare His way before Him.

Therefore, He declared plainly, *“I am not the Christ.”* And when they asked, *“What then, are you that Prophet?”* He simply said, *“NO.”*

For the Prophet of whom we speak was not born of Elizabeth but of Mary.

This, Jesus Christ, is God in the flesh—Immanuel.

This is the very same God who thunderously spoke the ten commandments to the children of Israel from out of the smoke and fire on Mt. Sinai.

He is the same God whose sight was so frightening that the people pleaded with Him to go away even though He was already distanced from them by a mile or more and shrouded in darkness to boot.

What a wonderful thing that this terrible and mighty God could so thoroughly wrap Himself in flesh that now He comes to us in the most intimate way.

When His people could once not even tolerate His presence from a mile away, today you are blessed to take Him completely into your bodies.

When once the people cried out for Moses to tell them what God said, rather than to hear it from Him—today, God speaks to you with His own mouth.

And like a modern-day John the Baptist, I am here to proclaim that this God stands in your midst—*“The Lord is at hand!”*

“I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me is preferred before me.”

But, as the saying goes, ‘familiarity breeds contempt.’ The intimacy of God's presence among His people is often overlooked.

The closer God comes—the more He is despised and unknown.

Now that God has fulfilled His gracious Word and come to us in flesh and blood, instead of receiving this gift with rejoicing, He is ridiculed and despised because He is not flashy enough, not more majestic enough.

When God appeared in smoke and majesty and awe, the people were too frightened to approach. Now that He appears in unobtrusive humility, they are too bored.

“Church should be more exciting.” “We need more spectacular miracles.”

“Powerful amplifiers, a driving beat and frenzied worship—majesty and power.”

But God replies: *“not many worldly wise, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.”*

While the undiscerning world was enamored with the terrifying power of Roman rule, God was demonstrating His power by dying on the Cross.

George Friedrich Handel, got it right when He put the famous "Halleluia Chorus" right at the climax of the crucifixion scene.

And flowing from the solid foundation of Jesus' glorious debasement, He says:

“In simple water I come to drown your sin and lust and raise you up to new life.

“In thoroughly human words, I come to declare heavenly things and to pronounce God's own righteousness upon you.

“In a wafer of bland bread and a sip of wine, I Myself give you angel's food.

It is only fitting that God should come in foolish, weak, base and despised means—for after all, He is coming to the foolish, weak, base and despised.

And it was precisely about this that He warned, *“And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.”*

But while the world and unbelief despises God's presence in the person of Jesus Christ, the faith which He gives you today through His presence restores you to see and know the Lord who stands in your midst unrecognized by the world.

By coming to you in Word and in Sacrament, the Holy and Righteous God who once appeared in the smoke and fire on Mt. Sinai today comes near to you not to frighten you but to give you peace and joy.

For since God has become flesh so that you are able today to tolerate His close and personal presence—you can also rejoice that He wears this same flesh and blood for all eternity.

Therefore, in heaven also you will find the same God who has become flesh and rejoice in His presence eternally.

Therefore: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.”* AMEN.