

FOCUS: The Good News is God's promise for salvation comes in the Word made flesh. (Fifth in a series)

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We begin the new secular year where we ended the old—in the season of Christmas and exploring what it means to be saved by the great acts of God toward his creation. Our Gospel this morning is one of the two Gospels appointed for Christmas Day itself, so it's good that we have a chance to hear these familiar words from St. John this year, since we don't have the opportunity to gather on Christmas morning for worship very often.

God's promise to his chosen people is that we shall be saved. Our sins are forgiven completely and unconditionally because God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to come and take human form, and dwell among us. Jesus dies on the Cross as the final sacrifice for our sins, and rises from the tomb as the final victory over death and the devil. By these actions, our salvation has been secured and we, the adopted children of God, receive a part of the rights and benefits of our inheritance by being baptized and thus receiving the Holy Spirit. That's it, folks—Simple, straightforward, and uncomplex.

However, for centuries—even millennia—theologians and others writing about the faith have made their living making the simple into the complex. After all, if it were really this simple, why would we need theologians and pastors? Besides, there is something in our human nature that *wants* to make faith something complex and difficult so that it feels like we are really doing something. You might recall the Old Testament story about the army commander, Naaman, who was sent to Elisha, the prophet of the Hebrew people, in order to be cleaned and healed of a skin disease. Elisha didn't even come out of his tent to meet Naaman. Rather, he sent one of his followers out to tell the mighty general to wash himself in the Jordan River seven times and he would be healed. Wash in the Jordan? Yes, that's all he had to do, but Naaman was expecting more. How could something as simple as a bath heal him?

Naaman almost walked away in disgust, but he was convinced by those around him that there was nothing to lose in doing the simple things,

especially since Naaman was willing to do a much harder task. Naaman begrudgingly did as Elisha instructed, and behold! Naaman's skin problems went away, and the Lord God of Israel had a new follower as well. Elisha knew the power of God, and he knew that God's power would be made known to Naaman, too, through simple things.

Our salvation comes without a great deal of effort or challenge to ourselves. In baptism, a simple washing in water really, we are made children of God and coheirs with Christ. For us, salvation isn't a difficult thing to receive. Believe and be baptized. That's it. But for God, salvation of his chosen people came at a great cost.

For God, the cost of giving his chosen people salvation—making them righteous before him—was to send his only begotten Son to earth in human form, and for his Son to die for us and for all people. And in being saved, we receive God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus. This is the word of truth found in the Gospel. It is the word of truth which we hear shared with the Ephesians. This is the Word made flesh, whom we celebrated just ten days ago. This is the Light of the world, which cannot be overcome by darkness.

On Tuesday, we will gather here again to worship the Light of the world being made known to another, much larger part of God's creation. Tuesday, the sixth day of January, is the feast of the Epiphany of our Lord. Tuesday is the day when the church catholic celebrates the Light of the world—the infant Jesus, Son of God and son of man—being made known to the Gentiles through the visit of the Magi to the Holy Family. This, too, is a part of God's plan of salvation, because it brings the Gentiles—the great majority of the peoples of the world who are not Jewish—into a relationship with God and offers to them a path to salvation and everlasting life as children of God.

It's not about what we do as the children of God. If it were, all we would need is the law of Moses to follow. But, we fail miserably at following the law, so God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, through whom came grace and truth.

This is the Good News. Thanks be to God!