

Its meaning will finally be revealed in its fullest  
when, in the endless ages of eternity,  
His love does not lessen, does not cease.

*O give thanks unto the God of heaven:  
for his mercy endureth forever.*

*O give thanks unto the Lord of Lords:  
for his mercy endureth forever.*

Amen.

**Addresses  
for  
Morning and Evening Prayer**

**according to the  
1943 Lectionary  
of the  
USA 1928 Book of Common Prayer**

**Intended for use  
by Layreaders  
in the absence of a priest**

**by Ed Pacht  
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**Christmas Eve  
and  
Christmas Day**

## Evening Prayer Christmas Eve

### **First Lesson: Zech. 2:10-13**

*Here beginneth the tenth verse  
of the second chapter of the Prophet Zechariah.*

10 Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD.

11 And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee.

12 And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again.

13 Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.

*Here endeth the First Lesson.*

Christmas is not the presents under the tree.  
It's not the joy in children's eyes.  
It's not the warmth of family gatherings.  
Though all these are good and appropriate,  
they are not what Christmas is about

Christmas is not even the manger,  
nor the star of Bethlehem,  
nor the angels singing to the shepherds,  
nor the sweet picture of Mother and Child.  
No, these are all essential to the story,  
but they are not what it is about.

Christmas is the first earthly step  
in a mystery above all mysteries.  
It is the coming of God Himself  
into His own creation.  
It is the gathering of time and eternity into one.  
It is the beginning of a great and solemn sacrifice.  
That sweet Baby in the Blessed Mother's arms  
is already offered as a bloody sacrifice for sins.  
He took flesh only in order to give it up for us,  
to suffer death on the Cross for our redemption.  
Bethlehem has meaning in the light of Calvary,  
in the horrible death He died out of that great love.

Its meaning is made clear at Gethsemane,  
when He,  
knowing in His humanity the horror ahead,  
yielded nonetheless to the Father's will.

Its meaning is made clear as he suffered and died.

Its meaning shines forth in glory  
in Easter's powerful victory over death.

Love is not defined by what we feel,  
 but by the nature of God Himself,  
 and He proclaims His love,  
 not with empty words of, "I love you,"  
 but with a Cross,  
 with a gift of action far greater than we can imagine.

*" ... thou, Bethlehem Ephratah,  
 though thou be little  
 among the thousands of Judah,  
 yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me  
 that is to be ruler in Israel;  
 whose goings forth have been from of old,  
 from everlasting. "*

Our celebration today centers on Bethlehem,  
 on a stable and a manger,  
 on a Baby who is the Son of God,  
 but none of this has any meaning without the Cross.

Words are cheap,  
 but the eternal Word of God became flesh,  
 not to provide us with a pretty story,  
 wonderful though that story is,  
 but in order to offer that flesh as our propitiation,  
 as the price paid out of love,  
 for the salvation of the much-beloved people,  
 the chosen Bride whom He has chosen,  
 to whom He has pledged unending love,  
 not "until death do us part",  
 but to all eternity.

## **Second Lesson: Matthew 1:18-25**

*Here beginneth the eighteenth verse of the first  
 chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.*

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise:  
 When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph,  
 before they came together, she was found with  
 child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and  
 not willing to make her a public example, was  
 minded to put her away privily.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold,  
 the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a  
 dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not  
 to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is  
 conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt  
 call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people  
 from their sins.

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled  
 which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and  
 shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his  
 name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God  
 with us.

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the  
 angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto  
 him his wife:

25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her  
 firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

*Here endeth the Second Lesson.*

**Homily**

Tonight we sing and we rejoice.  
 Tonight our voices raise to join the angel chorus.  
 Tonight we celebrate.  
 The Promised One has come.  
 The Savior is revealed:  
 the Word is made flesh and dwells among us.  
 The God of gods, the Maker of all that is,  
 the Judge of the living and the dead,  
 He that condemns all sin,  
 and yet embraces sinners who repent.  
 The King has come,  
 to dwell in the midst of us,  
 to call many nations to Himself,  
 and to make them one holy people,  
 His people.

So it was prophesied.  
 So it was promised to and through the Prophet  
 Zechariah.  
 And so it came to pass.  
 Two thousand years ago the days came.

*The angel of the Lord announced unto Mary,  
 and she conceived by the Holy Ghost.*

He said to her:

*Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.*

He told her that she would bear the Holy One.  
 Though questioning, though fearful, she responded

*Be it unto me according to thy word.*

**Homily**

*"Herein is love,  
 not that we loved God, but that he loved us,  
 and sent his Son  
 to be the propitiation for our sins."*

We talk a lot about love.  
 We fall in love.  
 We have feelings of love.  
 We make pictures of hearts and cupids and arrows.  
 We've even taken the feastday  
 of an obscure priest-martyr  
 by the name of St. Valentine,  
 and made it into a holiday all about love.  
 Some beautiful things are done  
 in the name of love,  
 but oh-so-many sins have been blamed on love,  
 and, if we can fall in love,  
 apparently we can fall out of it,  
 and on that is blamed the destruction  
 of many families.

St. John .puts it in perspective:  
 What we feel is not what defines the nature of love.  
 Because we say, "I love God",  
 that doesn't make it love,  
 not anymore than it makes it love to tell our  
 spouse,  
 "I'll love you forever  
 -- or at least as long as the feeling lasts."

*"Herein is love,  
 not that we loved God, but that he loved us,  
 and sent his Son  
 to be the propitiation for our sins."*

**Second Lesson: 1 John 4:7-14**

*Here beginneth the seventh verse of the fourth chapter of the First Epistle of St. John.*

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

*Here endeth the Second Lesson.*

Heaven rang with the shouts of angels,  
and the Virgin conceived,  
and, in the consecrated temple of her womb,  
God became man and began to grow.  
Emmanuel, God with us,  
the Eternal, the Almighty,  
God the Son of God,  
begotten of the Father before all worlds,  
yet unborn,  
but from that day our Brother in the flesh,  
one of us, yet without sin,  
and yet fully God in His very nature,  
King of kings and Lord of lords.

At the word of the same angel,  
Joseph accepted her as wife and her Son as his,  
and the day came,  
and she brought Him forth.

Look to the manger where He lay.  
Behold the Son of God.  
The Mighty One, clothed in weakness,  
who needed to be fed, to be dressed, to be changed,  
to be protected from very real dangers,  
equal to God, and yet willing  
to become the weakest of creatures, for us,  
willing to live out that weakness in a lifetime,  
submitting to a cruel scourging and death,  
refusing to call the angels that waited for His command,  
but accepting the seeming finality of death.  
He died in our weakness,  
but He rose with the infinite power of God,  
conquered death,  
and leads us on to victory.

Tonight we sing.  
 Tonight we join the angels  
 as they dance around the Throne.  
 We celebrate,  
 we make a joyful noise unto the Lord.  
 Our joy is without bounds  
 until we turn our eyes upon the reality.  
 In the manger,  
 on the Cross,  
 on the altar,  
 in our own hearts,  
 we see God Almighty.  
 Oh, if we truly see,  
 it is more than mere humans can bear,  
 and thus it was that the Prophet called out:

*Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD:  
 for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.*

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,  
 and with fear and trembling stand;  
 Ponder nothing earthly minded,  
 for with blessing in his hand  
 Christ our God to earth descendeth,  
 our full homage to demand.

Amen.

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 see also the sermon by Canon Hollister  
 under this date  
 in the Sermons by Other Authors

little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee  
 shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in  
 Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old,  
 from everlasting.

3 Therefore will he give them up, until the time  
 that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then  
 the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the  
 children of Israel.

4 And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the  
 LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD  
 his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be  
 great unto the ends of the earth.

*Here endeth the First Lesson.*

## Evening Prayer Christmas Day

### **First Lesson: Micah 4:1-5, 5:2-4**

*Here beginneth the fourth chapter of the Prophet Micah.*

1 But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

2 And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

3 And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

4 But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.

5 For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever. ...

5:2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be

## Morning Prayer Christmas Day

### **First Lesson: Isaiah 9:2-7**

*Here beginneth the second verse of the ninth chapter of the Prophet Isaiah.*

2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

4 For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.

5 For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.

6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

*Here endeth the First Lesson.*

## Second Lesson: Luke 2:1-20

### Luke 2

*Here beginneth the second chapter  
of the Gospel according to St. Luke.*

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

Accept His forgiveness,  
in the still small voice with which He speaks,  
in the Sacraments  
which He has given and still gives,  
and seek, by the power of His Holy Spirit  
that His will might be expressed  
both in your own life  
and in the world around you.

As Isaiah wrote:

*Of the increase of his government and peace  
there shall be no end,  
upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom,  
to order it, and to establish it with judgment  
and with justice  
from henceforth even for ever.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

Let us pray.

O God, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of thine only Son Jesus Christ; Grant that as we joyfully receive him for our redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our Judge, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

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see also the sermon by Canon Hollister  
under this date  
in the Sermons by Other Authors

This Baby is more than a cute little child.  
 This Baby is God Almighty,  
 The everlasting Word of God  
 by whom all things were spoken into being.  
 In that manger lay the Infinite One,  
 not only God, but fully human,  
 clothed with all the helplessness and vulnerability  
 of any human child.  
 God, yet one of us.  
 And why is he there?  
 Because we have sinned and need a Savior.  
 and because God wants us to be saved.

It's time to celebrate.  
 It's time that our joy should be full.  
 The things that we do on Christmas  
 are right and fitting,  
 but are they enough?

It appears that the Blessed Mother didn't think so.  
 As St. Luke said,

*But Mary kept all these things,  
 and pondered them in her heart.*

Ponder them.  
 Remember your great need --  
 the sins you have committed  
 and continue to commit,  
 the rebellion  
 that hasn't yet been removed from your heart --  
 remember, and remember also  
 that you have a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.  
 Flee to Him.  
 Lay those sins at His feet.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of  
 David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find  
 the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a  
 manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude  
 of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,  
 good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone  
 away from them into heaven, the shepherds said  
 one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem,  
 and see this thing which is come to pass, which the  
 Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary,  
 and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known  
 abroad the saying which was told them concerning  
 this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those  
 things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered  
 them in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and  
 praising God for all the things that they had heard  
 and seen, as it was told unto them.

*Here endeth the Second Lesson.*

## Homily

*"The people that walked in darkness ..."*

Isaiah begins this morning where we must begin,  
as we celebrate this joyous Christmas Day.  
He begins with a good look at the deep darkness,  
the shadow of death,  
the heavy burden of sin.

Too many come to Christmas  
as an excuse to party,  
the presents, the tinsel, the lights,  
Santa, the reindeer, and Rudolph the red-nosed,  
and starry-eyed children,  
and sweet stories about angels and shepherds,  
and, oh yes, a certain cute little Baby.

There's nothing wrong with any of that,  
except that it's only fun,  
without much meaning,  
and certainly without eternal mystery.

*"The people that walked in darkness ...",*  
began Isaiah.

There's a hymn, "O Holy Night", that begins:

*"Long lay the world, in sin and error pining ..."*

A familiar carol, "God rest ye merry, gentlemen,"  
includes these words:

*"... to save us all from Satan's power, for we were  
gone astray ..."*

There's a reason for the celebration today.  
There is something to celebrate.  
It's that an enormous and desperate need  
has been met,  
and has been met in a wondrous fashion.

Year by year we hear the beautiful story  
as it is told by St. Luke.

We can almost see the angels.

We can almost feel what the shepherds felt.

We love to imagine ourselves in that stable,  
at that manger,

kneeling with that Mother

before her newborn Son.

Many of us are brought to tears by the story,  
and rightly so, but why?

*"For unto you is born this day in the city of David  
a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."*

A Saviour.

Why a Saviour?

Because we need one.

Because we have erred and strayed from His ways  
like lost sheep.

... and there is no health in us.

Because we quite justly deserve Hell.

And because God, quite simply,  
doesn't want us to go there.

He loves us,

enough that He gave His only-begotten Son,

that we, believing on Him, don't need to perish,  
but might have everlasting life.

A Saviour!

Well might we join with Isaiah to shout:

*"... unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:  
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,  
The mighty God, The everlasting Father,  
The Prince of Peace."*