

Christmas 1

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Isaiah 9:2-7

Second Lesson: Luke 2:1-20

Homily to be written

Christmas 1

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Isaiah 49:8-13

Second Lesson: Hebrews 2

Homily

*Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth;
and break forth into singing, O mountains:
for the LORD hath comforted his people,
and will have mercy upon his afflicted.*

What incredible richness in this morning's lessons!
What magnificent joy!
What unimaginable promise!

This is a troubled world in which we live.
We all know that, without being told.
We can hear the news.
We know about wars and rumors of wars.
We're all acutely aware of the spread of immorality.
Nothing really seems to be right,
or comforting,
or dependable.
Why, even the church has been failing us.
That's why we've ended up in a jurisdiction
that looks so small and isolated to those outside.

We are seeking certainty, and comfort, and hope.
But these are not things we have power to make.
If we are honest with ourselves,
we know that we, too, are troubled,
broken, dysfunctional.
As we said, "There is no health in us."
In ourselves,
we have no answers.

But a mere few days ago, it was Christmas.
What a warm, sentimental, and comforting day.
For most of us it is a time of family, of feasting,
of joy in the eyes of children.
For most of us it is a time of memory-building,
a happy place in our minds where we can go
when the present life seems too hard.
For most of us, but not all.
Sometimes the stresses of a sick family,
or the aching loneliness of not having one,
or the remembrance of bitter events,
can drive away the simple human joys.
Sometimes the feasting turns to ashes.
Even at its best the merriment can only
hide the sorrows and stresses of life.
A party simply can't answer deep needs.

But a mere few days ago, it was Christmas,
and Christmas is far more than the parties,

far more than the families,
far more than all the celebrations we enjoy.

In that manger we are so happy to remember,
was laid the supreme evidence of God's love.
The Creator became a part of His own creation.
God himself became as truly human as you or I.
As Hebrews records,
he was made a little lower than the angels,
not a mighty and fearsome being
before whom we must fall down,
but one of us,

*Forasmuch then
as the children are partakers of flesh and blood,
he also himself likewise took part of the same.*

He ate and drank, and even submitted himself
to being changed like a baby,
for he was one:
King of kings, Lord of lords,
and a weak and dependent little child,
[He] took part of the same;
that through death he might destroy him
that had the power of death, that is, the devil;
And deliver them who through fear of death
were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Born as a man, lived as a man,

suffered all the indignities that men do to men,
and died,
and in his voluntary sacrificial death,
conquered death,
delivered us who were captives,
and opened the gates to everlasting life.

Just a few days ago, it was Christmas,
and, not because of all the forced merriment
that we humans try to pour into a winter holiday;
but because His Incarnation,
His death, and His resurrection
have set us free --
because of this
we sing, we shout, we make merry,
and so shall we do forever.

Let us pray.

O Lord of all that was and is and ever shall be,
thou that tookest our flesh upon thee
and walkedst among us,
thou that diedst our death upon the Cross,
and rising didst break the bonds of death,
guide us daily unto true repentance,
and fill our hearts with the joy of thy salvation,
thou who livest with the Father and the Holy Ghost,
One God now and forever. Amen.

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Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Isaiah 63:7-16

Second Lesson: 2 Peter 1:1-11

Homily

*"...I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD,
and the praises of the LORD, according to all that
the LORD hath bestowed on us, ..."*

So said the Prophet Isaiah,
and isn't that just what we are doing this time of
year?

In the words of the old spiritual:

*"Go tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere.
Go tell it on the mountain,
that Jesus Christ is born."*

We have a message,
a powerful message,
a joyful message.

Why, even those who don't believe
are proclaiming it.
Money mad merchants

are joining in with Holy Church
Their loudspeakers have been sounding forth
about the angels' song,
about the manger scene,
about the holy child.
Lights gleam in a spirit of celebration.
Jesus Christ is born!

But Isaiah goes on,
with a message the world doesn't really want:
*"In all their affliction he was afflicted,
and the angel of his presence saved them:
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;
and he bare them,
and carried them all the days of old. "*

The world doesn't really want to be rescued.
"We're just fine as we are," it says,
"All we want is more of the same ..."
Remember the advice
right after the tragic events of nine-eleven?
The president and many economists told us
that what we needed to do was simple:
"Just go shopping."
Maybe it makes sense
to strengthen the economy in that way,
but even if it does,

such advice completely ignores the root of the tragedy.

These events resulted not from a weak economy, but from sin in the hearts of men, from rebellion against the sovereign will of God.

As Isaiah continued:

"But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. "

But the same God who justly looks with wrath on the sin that fills the world, looks upon us, fallen as we are, and

"...God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

He took our nature upon Him, lived and died as one of us, and

"In all their affliction he was afflicted, ..."

He came, He died, He rose again, and so we celebrate, with great joy

And these are St. Peter's words:

"...his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. "

"Partakers of the divine nature"

Think of the power of those words.

We were made in the image and likeness of God. In our sin we forfeited that image. By His incarnation, His death, and His resurrection, that image is restored to us, and more. The eternal Son of God took on our nature, and, so doing, has shared His nature with us, and this thought is so great we can go no further with it, but only stand in awe.

Let us pray.

O God, who didst lay the foundation of man's being in wonder and honour, and in greater wonder and honour didst renew the same: Grant that as we celebrate the wondrous incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, he who was partaker of our humanity may make us joint-heirs of his very Godhead; Who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

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Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Job 28:12-28

Second Lesson: Matthew 11:25-30

Homily

*" ... And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God;
Begotten of his Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
Very God of very God;
Begotten, not made;
Being of one substance with the Father;
By whom all things were made:
Who for us men and for our salvation
came down from heaven,
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost
of the Virgin Mary,
And was made man: ... "*

We say these words
when we come together for Mass.
The Nicene Creed from which they are taken
is at the very center of our faith.
Do you understand the words you are saying?
Can you explain them well enough

to satisfy a doubter?

Not likely.

Those words are difficult words.

They carry ideas

that the human mind can't quite grasp,

because we are talking

about the incomprehensible reality

of a God who is too vast to be understood.

Some years ago

J. B. Phillips wrote a best-selling book.

It was titled, "Your God Is Too Small,"

and that is one thing that is always true.

Whatever thoughts we may have about God.

they aren't enough,

they can't be enough;

He is greater than we can possibly imagine,

and yet,

the Almighty God took our humanity upon Him,

and entered into His own Creation,

and we bow the knee

before such an incomprehensible mystery:

"And the Word was made flesh

and dwelt among us"!

How can we pretend to understand that?

But we believe.

Our Scripture Lessons this Evening are short,
 but profound.
 Job had been through a great deal.
 There had been much of tragedy,
 much of sadness,
 much of pain in his life,
 and he did not understand it at all.
 His friends gave him all kinds
 of apparently good advice,
 and made all kinds of plausible explanations,
 but finally he began to say what we heard read.

"Where shall wisdom be found?
 It can't be bought.
 Its price can't even be known.
 The depths don't have it, nor do the heights
 it is hid from the eyes of all living, "

There's no way to figure it out.
 Life is a mystery.
 Death is a mystery.
 God is a mystery.
 But we seek answers.
 We need answers.
 What are we to do?
 Listen to Job. He says:

God understandeth the way thereof,

*and he knoweth the place thereof. ...
 ...And unto man he said,
 Behold, the fear of the LORD,
 that is wisdom;
 and to depart from evil is understanding."*

We are confronted in this blessed season
 with the presence of an infinite God
 who has taken flesh
 and has showed himself among us.
 We cannot understand Him,
 but we can know him.
 We can touch Him.
 Incredibly, we can even eat His Flesh and drink His
 Blood
 and take His own substance into ourselves.
 We still lack answers,
 no matter how much we want them,
 but we have all the answer we need.
 We have Him,
 and with awe and thankfulness we can approach
 Him.
 As He said:

*" ... I thank thee, O Father,
 Lord of heaven and earth,
 because thou hast hid these things
 from the wise and prudent,*

*and hast revealed them unto babes.
 ... no man knoweth the Son, but the Father;
 neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son,
 and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*

And so it is that
 to every question we may ask
 He has already given the answer,
 one all-encompassing and complete answer
 to every need:

*"Come unto me, all ye that labour
 and are heavy laden,
 and I will give you rest.
 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me;
 for I am meek and lowly in heart:
 and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

How silently, how silently,
 The wondrous gift is given!
 So God imparts to human hearts
 The blessings of his heaven.
 No ear may hear his coming,
 But in this world of sin,
 Where meek hearts will receive him still
 The dear Christ enters in.

O holy child of Bethlehem!
 Descend to us, we pray;
 Cast out our sin and enter in,
 Be born in us today.
 We hear the Christmas angels
 The great glad tidings tell;
 O come to us, abide with us,
 Our Lord Emmanuel!
 Amen.