

tion. The Son gives us a life in which to live. In Him we can most richly live, for He is life itself. To live in Him is life everlasting, life which deepens and lasts forever.

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December 24, 2011

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xl (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Zechariah 2:10-13 (KJV).

³ St. Matthew 1:18-25 (KJV).

⁴ *I.e.*, *Yeshua*, or “Yahweh is salvation”, an Aramaic form of Joshua.

⁵ St. Matthew 1:21 (KJV).

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SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER

Christmas Eve

(December 24)

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Verse of the second Chapter of Zechariah.²

“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith [**SETH**] the LORD. 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. And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eighteenth Verse of the first Chapter Epistle of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.³

“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. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. 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. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS:⁴ for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being inter-

preted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS..”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[S]he shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering Star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.

G. K. Chesterton, who wrote this poem, was amazed at the paradoxes surrounding Jesus’ birth: “the things that cannot be and that are.” The universe cannot contain God, yet hidden He lies in Mary’s womb. Mary is a virgin, yet a mother. Mary, a creature, gives birth to her creator. Out of the darkness of the cave comes the Light of the world. Out of the cold comes the fire of God’s love. Out of poverty come divine riches. In the place where God was homeless, all men are at home.

Tonight is our feast of gratitude and admiration for these amazing paradoxes. Tonight is our feast of gratitude and admiration for the great little One! His “all-embracing birth lifts earth to heaven and heaven to earth,” muses another poet.

From the manger in the cave, a little hand reaches out to bridge the terrible gap between man and God, between man and man, a hand that will one day reach out on the Cross to bridge all the gaps. Therefore on this night man can put behind him the last hours of loneliness he need ever know.

The great promise of the Old Testament was that God would come and partake of our human nature. The great and precious promise of the New Testament is that we can now be partakers of His divine nature. We are by grace what He is by nature: sons of God. Therefore on this night we can put behind us the last hours of despair and loneliness we need ever know.

Truly, the hinge of history swings on the door of a Bethlehem stable. “B.C.” and “A.D.” demarcate all history.

Our stand in these early years of the new century is the stand of the Church for this ultimate truth, that God the Son has taken our human nature, so that we may be partakers of the divine nature. All history is marked from the point in time when this first became so. The Incarnation is the center of history and the turning point of all creation. The Incarnation is the most radical thing that has ever happened. From the Incarnation onwards our fallen race can be lifted up in Christ to share in His sonship.

The Holy Spirit is evermore present to win the hearts of all who would receive Him, to win us even with His style, with the things that cannot be and that are. The Light of the world comes from a dark cave. The riches of the Godhead are seen in a poor manger. The fire of God’s love is known in the cold. Mary is the virgin Mother who suckles her Maker. All men are at home where God was homeless. “God, I like your style,” is a prayer of gratitude and admiration. Our heavenly Father does not give us explanations about suffering and tragedy and mortality. He gives us a Son. By the Holy Ghost, in the womb of Mary, He gives us *the* Son. The Son is better than an explana-