

Sermon for Evening Prayer Christmas Eve

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Verse of the second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Zechariah [**ZECK-are-eye-uh**].²

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

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

² Zechariah 2: 10-13 (KJV).

³ St. Matthew 1: 18-25 (KJV).

⁴ Zechariah 2: 10b-11a (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 1: 22-23 (KJV).

⁶ Isaiah 7: 14 (KJV).

⁷ HERBERT G. MAY AND BRUCE M. METZGER, EDs., THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA, REVISED STANDARD VERSION 831 (Oxford University Press 1977).

⁸ *John L. McKenzie, The Gospel According to Matthew*, in II RAYMOND E. BROWN, JOSEPH A. FITZMYER, AND ROLAND E. MURPHY, EDs., THE JEROME BIBLICAL COMMENTARY 67 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1968).

⁹ MAY AND METZGER, *op. cit.* 1172 fn.

¹⁰ St. Matthew 28: 18-20.

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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 First Lesson: “I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people....”⁴

And from the Second Lesson: “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 interpreted is, God with us.”⁵

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

There is one thought that is clearly expressed in both of this evening’s Lessons. In the First Lesson, Zechariah quotes God as saying He will come to dwell among us and that when He does, then many nations will be joined to Him and will become His people. Clearly, this prefigures Our Lord’s coming in the Incarnation, that is, in His birth in human flesh, which we celebrate tonight.

Likewise, it also clearly prefigures the change His Incarnation has made in the relationship between God and humanity: no longer is the Chosen People a restricted clan in which membership is obtained by birth but now it is the whole population of the Church in which membership is obtained by expressed faith and baptism – that is, not by “birth” but by “re-birth”.

These themes are confirmed in tonight’s Second Lesson, in which St. Matthew quotes indirectly one of Isaiah’s prophecies of the Messiah: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and call his name Emmanuel.”⁶ The appositeness of this becomes even more apparent when we realize that the name “Emmanuel” itself means “God is with us”.⁷ Similarly, “Jesus” comes from the Greek form of “Joshua”,⁸ the name of the great Old Testament leader who was Moses successor and who led the Israelites out of the wilderness and into the promised land. Further, it can be understood to mean “He will save us”.⁹

Conclusion:

Thus these two Lessons give us, in a nutshell, God’s revelation to us of the coming of Christ, of Christ’s foundation of the Church, and of the Church as the New Israel:

As Christ’s names “Emmanuel” and “Jesus” tell us, He comes to be “God with us” because “He will save us”. There we have the seed of the Church’s understanding of God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Redeemer.

When Christ came in human flesh, He was with us in that body until His Ascension and thereafter He is with us through the agency of His mystical Body, the Church.

And, as Christ told us in His “Great Commission”¹⁰ to the Church, through our efforts on His behalf, many nations are joined unto Him, to be His people.

That is what we celebrate tonight

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