

SERMON FOR LAYREADERS

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Brian McKee¹

First Lesson:²

Here beginneth the second Verse of the ninth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“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. 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. 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. 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. 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, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. 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:⁴

Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁵

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

be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius [SYE-reen-ee-uss] was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 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:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 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. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. 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. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 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.

to God, not us. God has only loaned them to us. If it were not for the grace of God, we might have nothing. Beyond what we really need to live, we should use our financial resources to support our parish church, support monastic communities, and other works of mercy for those in need. I challenge each of us to give of our treasure as a Christmas present to Jesus.

God gave his only-begotten Son to us for the ultimate Christmas present. It only follows that we should give back of our time, talent, and treasure as a present to thank God from providing the grace to forgive us of our sins.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, giver of the greatest present ever given, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who provided the way for us to have forgiveness of our sins: grant that we may evermore love Thee, and give back our meager gifts of thanksgiving to Thee. Through Thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, born in the manger in Bethlehem. *Amen.*

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² *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928/1943).

³ Isaiah 9:2-7 (KJV).

⁴ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928/1943).

⁵ St. Luke 2:1-20 (KJV).

⁶ Isaiah 9:6 (KJV).

Text:

From the First Lesson: “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.”⁶

Homily:

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, every year in December, there were lots of Christmas programs made for television. Unlike today, when there are very few Christmas programs made, in that era there were lots of them. Even Charles Schultz’s “Peanuts” cartoon strip became an animated Christmas special. In that time, before political correctness went wild, Linus even read today’s Second Lesson, from St. Luke’s Gospel, Chapter 2, on the animated television special. In addition, the whole group of “Peanuts” kids, and Snoopy, Charlie Brown’s dog, sang “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”, the beloved Christmas Hymn, composed by the Anglican Priest and Hymnwriter, the Rev. Charles Wesley.

Christmas songs, usually with secular themes such “Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer”, “Santa Claus Is Coming To Town”, “Frosty The Snowman” and others were turned into animated Christmas shows, with each Christmas song being expanded and developed into a story line.

One of these Christmas songs that was thus turned into a animated Christmas television program was called “The Little Drummer Boy”. This program, like some others in that era, was focused on the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ. This, in itself, seems very remarkable compared to today’s world where religion is not publicly acknowledged and Nativity displays are banned from public property.

“The Little Drummer Boy” song was expanded into a wonderful storyline that actually taught religious faith and reminded us that “Jesus is the reason for the season.” With the current fad for political correctness, this show is almost never aired in reruns the way “Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer” and “Frosty The Snowman” are. What a shame it is that this show isn’t seen on primetime television anymore.

The storyline was about a very poor young boy who lived in Bethlehem. The boy had no parents, having been orphaned. He was full of anger. The one thing he loved was playing his drum. Seeing the Magi presenting their gifts to the newborn King, the boy longed to give a gift to the baby Jesus. The boy’s heart, which had been filled with anger, warmed with love and peace at seeing the newborn Christ. Having no other gift to give, he played his drum for the baby Christ. Jesus smiled at him, the boy’s eyes filled with tears, and the boy’s life was changed.

This show really demonstrated why Jesus Christ, the very Son of Almighty God, came to earth. He came to mend broken hearts, to remove anger from our souls, and to bring us peace to our minds. In addition, He came to bring us forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.

As our text from Isaiah 9:6, says: “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.”

Notice that the little drummer boy wanted to give the newborn baby Jesus a “Christmas present.” In the past few days we have probably exchanged many Christmas presents. One important consideration is this: what have I given to Jesus Christ as a Christmas present?

There are essentially three presents that we should give to Jesus, not only on Christmas, but on every day of the year. These three presents all begin with the letter “t”, which is easy to remember as the lower case letter “t” looks like a Cross.

We should give Jesus our *time*. We need to spend time each day in prayer and meditation. We need to spend time each day reading the Bible. We need to donate time to our parish church, assisting however we can. We need to spend time telling others about Jesus, in simple everyday language, and encouraging them to find a new life in Christ. I challenge and encourage each of us to give our time to Jesus as a Christmas present.

We should give Jesus our *talent*. Just as the little drummer boy played his drum for baby Jesus, we, too, should use our God-given talents for service to Christ and His Church.

Many churches have no musicians, yet there are people sitting in the pews who know how to play the organ, or have lovely singing voices that could be a blessing to others singing in the choir. Perhaps the church has cracked plaster and needs to be repainted, yet skilled craftsmen do not volunteer to help. Perhaps there is a need for someone to send cards to absent parishioners, “get well” cards to the sick of the parish, and notes of encouragement to parish members who are going through trials. Any number of people with the talent to write such comforting notes do not volunteer to do it. I challenge us all to volunteer to give the talents that God has given each of us as Christmas presents to Jesus.

We should give Jesus gifts from our *treasure*. The Magi travelled across the desert to give the baby Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We, too, need to share from the financial resources that God has given each of us. The money we have, and all of our possessions really belong