

speech becomes quite natural. So, too, does this incomparable summary of what Our Lord's Coming means to all the peoples of the world:

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”¹³

--oo0oo--

The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister¹⁴
January 2, 2011.

¹ *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 32 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxi (CIPBC 1963).

² Isaiah 42: 1-16 (KJV).

³ St. Matthew 6: 19-34 (KJV).

⁴ Ephesians 1: 1-23 (KJV).

⁵ Isaiah 42: 6-7 (RSV).

⁶ Isaiah 42: 6-7 (RSV).

⁷ St. Luke 1: 78-79 (RSV).

⁸ St. Luke 1: 68-79.

⁹ Cf. St. Matthew 4: 16.

¹⁰ Cf. St. John 1: 4-5.

¹¹ St. Matthew 5: 14; St. John 8: 12 & 9: 5.

¹² Isaiah 58: 8 (RSV).

¹³ St. John 1: 4-5 (RSV).

¹⁴ Priest Assistant, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, Metairie LA; Honorary Canon, the Diocese of the Resurrection; Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

“Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof. Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar [KEY-darr] doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory unto the LORD, and declare his praise in the islands. The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace; I have been

still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools. And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.³

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

“²⁴No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even So-

and they form part of the canticle after the Second Lesson at Morning Prayer that we call the *Benedictus*.

Both our text this morning from Isaiah and Zechariah’s [zeck-are-EYE-ahz] song use the same poetic imagery to describe the same phenomenon: the coming of the Messiah will be like the bringing of light to those who have been permanently in darkness.⁹

The canticle uses in addition one of the most common examples of light bursting upon a darkened world,¹⁰ that of the dawn of a new day. Of course, the words of the Revised Standard Version, “when the day shall dawn upon us from on high”, may be clearer than the King James Version’s “whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us”, but they lack something of the poetry that rings through a phrase that was obsolescent even when King James’ committee of translators approved it.

But if no one in England in 1611 still spoke in everyday terms about the spring of the day, we have been bequeathed a lovely image that, in its very unfamiliarity, helps us to recall that Christ as the Light of the World¹¹ is the Dawn of a New Day over a world darkened by sin and death. In another place, Isaiah uses that same image again:

“Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear
guard.”¹²

Conclusion:

In fact, the New Testament is full of metaphors and similes that liken Jesus the Christ to light. When you think of the freedom and spiritual enrichment that adequate light represented to the peoples of the ancient world, that figure of

For the first time, the widespread availability of cheap kerosene enabled even people of modest means to use some of those evening hours of leisure for family pursuits, study, and recreation, things that had previously been possible only for the wealthy who could afford expensive candles or whale oil lamps.

So, not all that long ago, for most people the world was divided into the hours of daylight, when they were free to follow their various pursuits, and the hours of darkness, when they were confined to home and to bed. With that stark fact in mind, now listen once again to those words of our text this morning:

“I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison of those who sit in darkness.”⁶

Then compare them to these other words, taken from the first Chapter of St. Luke’s Gospel, words which are virtually memorized by those Anglicans who regularly read or hear the Office of Morning Prayer:

“[T]hrough the tender mercy of our God,
when the day shall dawn upon us from on high
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the
shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”⁷

These latter words are, of course, the Song of Zechariah⁸ [**zeck-are-EYE-ah**], which he sang when he was restored to speech upon the birth of his son, John the Baptist,

lomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Or,

Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.⁴

“¹Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have

obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson:

“I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,

to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison of those who sit in darkness.”⁵

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

Homily:

Quite a few years ago, I was driving through western Pennsylvania and decided to take the scenic route that follows the valley of Oil Creek up through Oil City to Titusville and then on north. Titusville, of course, is the place where, in 1858, Edwin Laurentine Drake drilled the first successful oil well in the United States, thus setting off the first oil boom as well.

So, naturally, I stopped in Titusville to see the site of Drake’s well and to visit the historical museum there. What impressed me most forcibly in that museum was its account of the way European history from the Renaissance through the 19th Century was, in many ways, the history of the search for more economic and reliable sources of light.

The museum made clear that, as Drake’s discovery was a half-century before the development of the automobile, the early boom in that “rock oil”, as it was called, had nothing to do with its later use as motor fuel. It was in high demand, and quickly made many great fortunes – including the famous Rockefeller fortune – because it could be easily refined into kerosene to fuel oil lamps.

This was because, in the absence of such sources, most human activity was confined to the hours of daylight. Productive work could take place only between dawn and dusk and, with the coming of nightfall, which for most people was their only period of leisure during the day, all work ceased and people had no choice but to go to bed.