

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The First Sunday in Advent¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz [EH-moss], which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah [uzz-EYE-uh], Jotham [DGAH-thamm], Ahaz [EH-hazz], and Hezekiah [hezz-ek-EYE-uh], kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

“Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

“Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no

more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

“Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.⁴

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus [*nick-oh-DEE-muss*], a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus [*nick-oh-DEE-muss*] saith [**SETH**] unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound

¹¹ Acts 8:16, 10:48, 19:5.

¹² Acts 11:26.

¹³ I John 2:1.

¹⁴ St. John 14:16, 17.

¹⁵ Hebrews 1:1 *ff.*

¹⁶ St. John 15:26.

¹⁷ St. John 14:16-17; 17:3 (KJV).

¹⁸ Jeremiah 31:31-34 (KJV).

¹⁹ Habakkuk 2:14 (KJV).

²⁰ Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:3 (KJV).

²¹ Acts 26:18 (KJV).

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Baptism in the One Name, revealed by the Risen Christ, is entrance into the New Covenant, into death to sin and the newness of life, into the knowledge of God. It is for all nations. To proclaim the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is to proclaim our only hope and our only salvation. Only the Risen Christ could reveal it, and so prepare His Disciples to receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

We know the Name not in some academic or theoretical sense, but rather because the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have been revealed in the coming of one *Paraklētos*, Christ our Lord, who defeated sin and death in His Passion and Resurrection, and the coming of the other *Paraklētos*, the Spirit of Truth, Who gives life and power to the Body of Christ. The revelation of the Trinity is the seal of our salvation history and it is our life here and now.

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The Rev'd Robert Hart²²
June 7, 2009

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on Trinity Sunday, 2009.

² *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 30 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER XXI (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER XIX (CIPBC 1963).

³ Isaiah 1:1-20 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 3:1-21 (KJV).

⁵ II Corinthians 5:17 (KJV).

⁶ Romans 6:9 (KJV).

⁷ *Editor's Note*: "Reasserters" are churchmen who, largely since 2000, say they are "reasserting" classical Anglican and Catholic doctrines in opposition to the "Revisionists" who advocate "making those doctrines 'up to date'".

⁸ Romans 6:1-4 (KJV).

⁹ St. Matthew 28:18-20 (KJV).

¹⁰ Acts 2:38.

thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus [*nick-oh-DEE-muss*] answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

It is fitting that we should read about new birth and be reminded that, “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*” Nicodemus asked the question, “*How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*”

The answer that Jesus gave him was about the invisible work of the Holy Spirit. Invisible and yet observable in effect; for the Holy Spirit's working cannot be seen, but his work can be seen when a man is born of water and of the spirit; for he is a new man in Christ, literally a new creation. *"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*⁵

Adam was a creature, and his offspring are creatures, but not individually created as much as creatures by derivation, in that each new human being is the result of a man knowing a woman (one hopes, his wife). But, in the new birth, each person is a new creature, individually created by the breath of God with that new life that we receive from the Risen Christ, that new life that is eternal and will survive our death, so that our mortal nature becomes a seed planted to be raised as Christ is risen, that is life immortal. *"Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."*⁶

Currently, among the "Reasserter"⁷ camp, we find that some who call themselves "Anglican" do not understand that John chapter three, where Jesus speaks of the new birth, is referring to Baptism. No doubt, they have never learned the genuine Anglican Catechism, embracing over the last thirty years, as they do, a book that has new things instead. But, here is what the authentic Anglican Catechism says:

"QUESTION. What is your Name?

Answer. N. or N. N.

Question. Who gave you this Name?

Answer. My Sponsors in Baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven."

This is also universal, to be proclaimed in all nations; for it is in all nations that we are to make and baptize disciples. *"For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."*¹⁹ In recent years we have read of false teachers (such as one Bishop Swing of the Episcopal "Church", he of the "United Religions Initiative in—wait for it—San Francisco) tell us that Christianity should no longer be a missionary faith, and that we should respect the alleged right of all people to have their ancestral gods.

Thank God St. Patrick did not think so, or *my* Irish ancestors would have continued the practice of human sacrifice, burning people in the Wicker Man. The Gospel is not a form of oppression, but the only way out of the darkness into the light. *"But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire.... And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place."*²⁰

It is a service, it is compassionate, to liberate people from the cruelty of paganism, and to bring to them knowledge of the true God. When the Church built its new shrines on the sites of old pagan shrines, it practiced wisdom, for the old ways of darkness were replaced by the worship of the loving God of salvation. In the old places of dread and darkness the Church built new places of joy and light.

We have been given a mission, whether or not the world and its defeated prince approve. The Church has that same mission in all the world that Christ gave in a special way to St. Paul: "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."²¹

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world can not receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. ... And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”¹⁷

Eternal life is to know the Spirit of Truth, for He alone reveals the Son. It is to know the Son, for He alone reveals the Father. It is to know the Father. Our salvation and eternal life is to know the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Hear what the Prophet Jeremiah foretold, as the substance of the New Covenant:

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith [SETH] the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith [SETH] the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”¹⁸

This is salvation and eternal life.

In Baptism we were adopted through Christ, born of water and the Spirit as children of God. This is clear from the sixth chapter of Romans:

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”⁸

Well, I understand why the Evangelicals interpret the new birth as that moment of conscious conversion, for in a sense it really *feels like* a new birth of sorts: This I know from my own experience. And, it likely completes something valid and real that was planted in Baptism, even though it may appear to unsympathetic critics as merely subjective. I understand why they resist the ancient teaching of the Church that the new birth is in Baptism, because their experience of conversion just *had to be* what Christ spoke of.

But the new birth is objective, and we must interpret John chapter three by Romans chapter six. The new birth is into *the newness of life*, having been buried with Christ by baptism into death, and raised to walk in the newness of life. That is objective and real; and for an Anglican it should contain no contradiction that we accept the teaching of the Catholic Tradition regarding the meaning of Scripture, and that we rejoice when a person’s dormant faith comes so alive in his soul that he can mark it as a beginning.

But it is the grace of his Baptism awakened by the Holy Spirit, so that his conscience, with all his heart and soul, renders him like the prodigal son who came to himself, and went home

to his father. And Baptism brings us to the nominal theme of Trinity Sunday. We must look at the words of the Risen Christ at the close of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, where we read the Great Commission:

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach [μαθητεύω, mathēteuō, make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”⁹

This new birth involves the full revelation of the Name of God. And, before proceeding, we must answer yet another objection some have. They have noticed, as have we, that in the Book of Acts Baptism was said to be in the Name of Jesus Christ,¹⁰ or the Lord Jesus.¹¹ But they do not understand. They make the mistake of assuming that Luke’s designation of Christian Baptism reveals the formula, or the actual words that were spoken, which is not at all what the text actually says.

When the Book of Acts reveals what happened in those earliest days, Luke is making clear that the Baptism of the Church was *not that of John the Baptist, but rather it was Christian baptism*. Since the word “Christian” appears only once in that whole book, as something that came about after many people were baptized,¹² it was not yet customary to say “Christian Baptism” as opposed to “the baptism of John.” But that this is the meaning is clearly drawn from the nineteenth chapter: *“Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”* Would those who think they are using the formula of Acts by rejecting the commandment of Christ at the close of Matthew’s Gospel, not have made the same argument if “Christian” had been a more fully established word from the

start? Would they not likely insist that the formula should be “I baptize thee a Christian”? Dom Gregory Dix discovered an ancient Baptism liturgy in which the Trinitarian formula appeared as part of a long prayer that was, as a whole, in the Name of Jesus Christ. This makes perfect sense.

The formula for baptism is “In the Name of The Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost (or Holy Spirit).” The revelation of this Name, indeed, this One Name, is the end result in Matthew’s Gospel, of all that Jesus did and said. *Now, we know God*. The revelation of this One Name of The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, could not be given to us before the Incarnation of the Word; the Name could not be revealed before Christ’s atoning death in which He took away the sins of the world; the Name could not be revealed until after He defeated death itself and rose from the grave.

The Name could be revealed only after we see the full picture of the Son, in His complete victory for our sakes over sin and death, having cast out the prince of this world in His Passion and Resurrection. And it had to be revealed *right then*, just before the Ascension and the ten days when the disciples were about to stand on that bridge between the coming of the first Comforter and the coming of the other Comforter; that is, between the coming of Christ our *Advocate* (παράκλητος, *paraklētos*¹³), and the coming of “the other *Comforter*” (same word, παράκλητος, *paraklētos*¹⁴), the Spirit of Truth.

God the Father has been perfectly¹⁵ revealed by the Son; and the Father and the Son are known only through the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Therefore, the revelation of the Divine Name is also the revelation of our salvation, for the revelation of the One Divine Name of The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit came only out of the mouth of Jesus Christ after He had accomplished all things, and was ready to go back to the Father in order to send the other *Paraklētos*. The new life, into which we are born again in baptism, is eternal life; that eternal life is to know the God of this revelation intimately.