

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 explanation. 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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The Rt. Rev'd Paul C. Hewett, SSC⁵
December 24, 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 31 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xx (CIPBC 1963).

² Zechariah 2:10-13 (KJV).

³ Titus 2:11—3:7 (KJV).

⁴ Zechariah 2:10 (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 eleventh Verse of the second Chapter Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Titus.³

“... For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing [**SHOW-ing**] all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers

lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith [SETH] the LORD.”⁴ 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