

The baby born in a small town far from the imperial city has done far more for the world than any government could ever do. The Man on the cross has done far more for the world than the government that put Him there. Caesar changed the circumstances under which people lived. But only Christ has changed people's hearts, and continues to change them. He made saints out of prostitutes, tax collectors, and other outcasts of society. He turned Saul of Tarsus from a persecutor of the Church to a great theologian and missionary. He has changed drunkards and criminals to productive citizens and benefactors. He has made saints and apostles out of craftsmen and fishermen. And He can make one out of you as well.

Forget the seat of government. Forget the seat of commerce. The action is in a manger being used as a bed for a baby. It is He who is able to implement the decree that was issued before the foundation of the world – the decree that all the world should be redeemed.

—oo0oo—

St. David's Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

December 25, 2010¹

¹ This sermon was delivered at the first Mass on Christmas Day, for which the Gospel appointed is the same as the Second Lesson at Morning Prayer on Christmas Day.

² THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 9: 2-7 (KJV).

⁴ St. Luke 2: 1-20 (KJV).

⁵ Better Quirinius, as the RSV gives it.

⁶ St. Luke 2:1 (RSV).

Sermon for Morning Prayer: Christmas Day¹

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest in Charge

The Lessons:²

The First Lesson: 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 [**MIDD-ee-ann**]. 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, Counsellor, 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.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁴

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus [**SEE-zar awe-GUSS-tuss**], that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius⁵ [**sigh-REE-knee-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.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

The Emperor had the power to control the circumstances under which people would live, and I must say that he did that very well. He improved and expanded the highway system throughout the empire. He erected milestones and road sign so that travelers would know where they were. The justice system under Augustus was swift and efficient. The Roman army was well trained, well equipped, and well disciplined, and the barbarian tribes were kept at bay in the fringes of the empire. Under this “Pax Romana,” as it was called, commerce flourished, science and the arts expanded, cities were beautified, the water supply was secured, and many public works were completed.

All of that cost money, of course, and taxes had to be raised, but I have to say that if a man ran for president of the United States with a record like that I would vote for him.

The seat of sin, however, is not in the conditions under which men live. The world is filled with godly people who live in poverty, ignorance, and danger. The world also has it share of wicked people who grew up with abundance and live in luxury. So Christian people realize that the cure for sin is not to change the environment, but change the person. For that reason, God issued a far more important decree than the Emperor’s decree. On that day long ago, when the emperor issued a decree that all the world should be taxed, a higher power that he sent out a decree that all the world should be saved.