

Sermon Sunday before Nativity

CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST !!!

O land of Zabulon, land of Nephtali, and the sea-coast, and beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. O People walking in darkness, see a great light; ye that dwell in the region and shadow of death, a light shall shine upon you. . . . For unto us a child is born, and a son is given, whose government is upon His shoulder and His Name is called: Angel of a great Counsel, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, King, Prince of Peace, Father of the age to come.

Today we hear of a rather lengthy genealogy. What is the point of this? other than to torture the deacon or priest who must read it?

The point is that Jesus Christ, the Word, became flesh – real flesh with real ancestors – sharing in our humanity, putting on ALL of it. For there are some stellar names here: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David. There are also some less than stellar names: Rahab was a harlot. Ruth was a gentile outsider. We are reminded that David committed adultery with Bathsheba. We are reminded of a slew of bad kings and a few good ones. Yet He is before all generation as Isaiah told us: “who shall declare His generation?”

Another reason for this genealogy is to put in relief the promise of God to Abraham, that in his offspring all the nations would be blessed. . . . his offspring, not his offspringS. Abraham was promised that one would arise from his lineage.

It is worth noting that in Luke’s genealogy that there appears some figures that were of the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe. Yet

even Luke's genealogy, which goes all the way back to Adam, is mostly of the tribe of Judah, the Royal line. Thus Christ is both our King and our High Priest.

But this genealogy starts with Abraham . . . Abraham who is called from his citizenship with his city to have his citizenship solely in God. . . Abraham who is given the promise of a son in whom all nations would be blessed . . . but Abraham had to wait. . . and Isaac was born of Sarah when she had almost past the age of childbearing . . . so the world must wait until the Son of God is born of a young Virgin who has only recently entered the age of childbearing. Isaac is born as the son of promise. And so Jesus is born as THE PROMISE.

Yet He comes from prostitutes and adulterers: He took upon Himself our broken nature: ALL OF IT – that He might heal our brokenness. As Isaiah said: He bears our sins and is pained for us. . . He was wounded on account of our sins, and bruised because of our iniquities. And by His bruises we are healed.

And so we have 14 generations times 3. That's 42 for all you Sci-Fi nerds and Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy fans.

Just as Jesus would put the care of His mother with His disciple John, so now God puts her care with Joseph. And the language is different from her cousin Elizabeth's experience. In Elizabeth and Zachariah's case it is "she shall bear you a son". In Mary's case it is "she shall bring forth a Son". And the Son she brought forth was not just to Mary and Joseph, but to the whole world.

And "He will save His people from their sins." There had been other messiahs before, that had saved the people from this or that enemy: the barbarians, the Greeks, the Babylonians. But Jesus will

save His people from their sins. This is a new type of Messiah above any other messiah. He is not A messiah; He is THE MESSIAH.

Mary has been chosen to bring forth God in the flesh. He takes His flesh from her. He Whom the universe cannot contain, is contained in the womb of the Virgin. This is the coming paradox that we will celebrate shortly. The paradox of God, Who IS beyond all time and culture and space, enters into time and enters a culture and inhabits a space. This is best expressed by our hymns which we will hear next week:

Today He Who holds the whole creation in His hands is born of a virgin. He whose essence none can touch is bound in swaddling-clothes as a mortal man. God, Who in the beginning fashioned the heavens, lies in a manger. He Who rained manna on His people in the wilderness is fed on milk from His mother's breast.

O inexpressible mystery
and unheard-of paradox;
the Invisible is seen;
the Intangible is touched;
the Eternal Word becomes
accessible to our speech;
the Timeless steps into time;
the Son of God becomes
the Son of Man.

Today, He holds creation in the hollow of His Hand is born of a Virgin. He Who in His being cannot be handled, as a mortal is wrapped in swaddling rags. God, Who of old established the heavens in the beginning lies in a manger. He Who rained Manna on the People in the desert is nourished with milk from

the breast. The Bridegroom of the Church summons Magi. The son of the Virgin accepts their gifts. We worship Thy birth, O Christ. Show us also Thy divine Epiphany. – Christmas Royal Hours, 9th hour

And it is no accident that this last hymn echos the last half of Holy Week. The irmos that is used on Holy Saturday Matins, and again at Nocturnes, right before the Paschal Matins:

Do not Lament me, O Mother, seeing Me in the tomb, the Son conceived in the womb without seed, for I shall arise and be glorified with eternal glory as God. I shall exalt all who magnify thee in faith and in love.

If we did complines for the Eve of Christmas Eve we would hear: “Be not amazed, O Mother, beholding Me now as a babe, Whom the Father begat from the womb before the morning star. For I have come openly to restore and glorify with Myself the fallen nature of mortal man, that magnifies thee in faith and love.

The feasts of Nativity and Pascha are clearly connected.

We must prepare our hearts to receive Him Who comes to be born of the Virgin for our salvation, as a little child. How do we prepare? We prepare by fasting (as you are able), by prayer, by alms – by making peace with our brothers and sisters as much as we are able . . . (for we receive the King of Peace) – by softening our hard hearts by coming to confession and communion – by uniting ourselves to our neighbors and (as St. Dorotheos of Gaza said) thereby uniting ourselves to God – by humbly approaching God, Who has become Man for our sakes.