

THE NEW-BORN KING

A Sermon for Christmas Eve, 2011

On the Texts: The Nine Lessons for the Service of Lessons and Carols:

Genesis 3: 8-19; Genesis 22:15-18; Isaiah 9:2-7; Isaiah 11:1-9; Luke 1:26-38;

Luke 2: 1-7; Luke 2: 8-16; Matthew 2:1-12; John 1:1-14

By the Reverend Doctor Randolph Constantine

We are gathered here tonight for a reason. We are gathered here to worship God. We are not here just to sing old familiar carols and to feel good in what we call “the spirit of Christmas”.

We are here to praise God and to thank Him for sending His Son to us so that we might have the hope of salvation and eternal life with Him. I am not sneering at the “spirit of Christmas”. If Christmas prompts us to feel goodwill toward others and to forgive them, then that is something that is good because it is what God wants us to do all the time, which is to love our neighbors just as much as we love ourselves. But Christmas is really about the Birth of the Christ child.

I am not trying to be a “grinch” here. I am just trying to get us to see that the reason for the season is first and foremost about Jesus Christ, His Birth, and why he came down from heaven to be born in a stable, to preach the Gospel of salvation by faith, and to die on a Cross for our sins.

The lessons we have just heard and the carols we have just sung tell us about the reasons why the angel came to Mary and why she and Joseph had to make the journey of about 80 miles from Nazareth down to Bethlehem where there were so many travelers that there were no rooms in the inns for them. Have you ever thought of just how selfish and hard-hearted the people in Bethlehem of Joseph and Mary’s day must have been? Most men in the United States in places where there are busses or subways for public transportation would give up their seats to any woman, but especially to one who was pregnant. There were big problems with that society, and they went back a long way, at least 4000 years.

Now I am going to do something that is most people would consider to be bad form for a Christmas sermon. I want to talk about *Why* Jesus had to come into the world, and I cannot do that without talking about that dirty word, **SIN**. I hope you will see it is necessary. There is a line in the first verse of a well-loved Christmas song that gives us a clue. That song is O Holy Night. I wouldn’t really call it a carol because it is not an easy song to sing. But there is one line in the first verse that tells us why Jesus came: It says, “Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.” How long did the world lie in sin and error? Almost from the beginning.

The first lesson we heard tells us of the aftermath of Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit, the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. They knew they had done wrong, and they knew they were naked. Because of what the serpent had done to tempt them and the fact that they yielded to the temptation, God cursed the serpent and told him that he and his descendants would be the enemies of the descendants of Eve, and that one or more of her descendants would step on his head, but that he would bruise his heel. This is generally considered to be a prophecy of the victory that Christ won over Death and Evil when He was on the Cross and is sometimes called the Proto-Gospel. God also laid curses on the Woman, the Man, and the earth itself. There has been sin and evil in the world ever since.

It may not seem like it, but every one of our nine lessons points toward Jesus Christ in one way or another. In the first lesson, it will be Jesus who conquers the serpent. In the second lesson, we have Abraham, who is the first of God's Chosen People, being told that God will bless him because he, Abraham, was willing to sacrifice his only son when God tested his faith by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. God stopped that sacrifice so that Abraham did not have to kill Isaac, but it would be God who sacrificed His Son. Lessons three and four from Isaiah are prophecies of the coming of Jesus that were written about 700 to 750 years before the Birth of Christ. The core of the third lesson is in verses 6 and 7 of Isaiah 9: "6 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. 7 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." This tells us many things: A Child shall be born. He shall be a Son and He is *given* to us. We do not have ask for this. He shall be given to us. He will be called many names. Five of them are given, and two of those would have caused most devout Jews to have a heart attack: "The Mighty God"? There will be a man on the throne of David, and he will be called, "The Mighty God"? How does that square with the Second Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me!"? And that is followed by another name for God, "The everlasting Father". The Jews might have thought Isaiah had gone crazy.

The fourth lesson began by proclaiming that a branch would come forth from the stump of Jesse, meaning a descendent of a man named Jesse. This Jesse was the father of King David, so this prophecy builds on the one in the third lesson by establishing the genealogy of this future

king and confirming the covenant God made with David. Then we hear of the righteousness of His judgments and that His reign will be so peaceful that the wolf will live with the Lamb.

The fifth lesson begins the readings from the New Testament with the announcement to Mary by the angel Gabriel that she had been chosen by God to bear a son whom she will name Jesus, a name that in Hebrew means, “The Lord is salvation”. Gabriel tells her things that in essence mean that Jesus will fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah.

The sixth and seventh lessons are back to back passages from the second chapter of St. Luke’s Gospel, and are the story of Mary and Joseph’s trip to Bethlehem, the Birth of Jesus, the angels bringing the news to the shepherds and singing Luke 2:14 **14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men of good will.** God has come down from heaven and taken on a body of flesh; He has become God Incarnate – God in the flesh. Now all that the baby Jesus has to do is manage to grow up and do what God the Father sent Him to do.

The eighth lesson tells us about the visit of the Wise Men from the East who came to see Jesus, who when they found Him worshipped Him and gave Him gifts. We celebrate this visit on January the sixth, the twelfth day of Christmas, as the Epiphany of the Lord, the appearance of the Jesus to the Gentiles. This lesson ends with the Wise men’s being warned **not** to go back to Herod to tell him where Jesus was. We do not read tonight of Herod’s evil plans toward Jesus, for they are not part of our story tonight; tonight we are about joy.

The ninth and last lesson tells us the story of Jesus’ coming from the theological perspective of St. John the Apostle who wrote the Gospel according to John. When someone reads this passage for the first time, the first 14 verses of the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel, it just seems to be a lot of words strung together in beautiful and poetic way, but not meaning very much. But if you will read it slowly and look at the relation between the phrases, you can see that it not only makes sense; but that the sense it makes tells you a lot of things you might not have known. I won’t take the time tonight to tease out all the meaning in this passage, but I will tell you some of it. Let’s look at just the first verse: John 1:1 **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** In the beginning, means at the time of creation. “**was the Word**” means that not only did the Word exist at the time of creation, but that the Word already existed, that is, the Word existed before the World was created; and in fact, the Word was God! The statement that “**the Word was with God, and the Word was God**” hints at God being somehow plural. This a hint at the beginning of the idea of the Trinity.

The second verse identifies the Word as male and says that He was with God at Creation. The third verse may come as a shocker. It says everything that was made at Creation was made through the Word and that there was not anything made without Him; Creation was His work! When we get down to the last verse, verse 14, we find out Who the Word really is: John 1:14 [4 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, \(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,\) full of grace and truth.](#)” The Word was God, and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us as God in the person of Jesus who became known as the Christ.

When Jesus was born the whole world lay in the darkness of sin. For all we know, God did not speak to the world outside of Israel at all, and He had not spoken to Israel for about 400 years. Persians, Greeks, and Romans, all pagans, had ruled Israel for over 500 years, and the Romans ruled when Jesus was born and when He died on the Cross. Proverbs 4:19 identifies darkness with evil, saying: [19 “The way of the wicked is like deep darkness”](#). In our lesson, John says of Jesus, [“4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”](#) We know that sin is an ever-present darkness or all of us. All during Advent we prayed that God would [give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put on us the armor of light](#). Tonight we celebrate the coming of that light.

Jesus is called by many names, and all of them are meaningful: the Light of the world, the Bread of life; John the Baptist called Him, [“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”](#). We are not saved by putting the blood of this lamb on our doorposts, but we are saved, by faith, in the blood He shed for us on the Cross.

Now, there is one name of Jesus we hear often in carols and hymns, and even in the Creed; but when we hear it or say it, we don't really think much of it. But it is more than a name; it is a title – King. Jesus is King, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Kingdom of God is just that, a kingdom; it is not a democracy; and it is ruled, right now, by Jesus Christ who sits on the throne at the right hand of the Father. Tonight, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the God-Man, who gave Himself over to death, to be sin for us and take away our sins that we might live. There is no more valuable a Christmas gift than the one God gave us – Himself, our King and Savior.

GLORY TO THE NEW-BORN KING!

AMEN!