

Christmas 1

I take as my text, from the Collect for this First Sunday after Christmas:

....Grant that we being regenerate, and made children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit....

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight O' Lord my Strength and my Redeemer.

The Nativity of our Lord, Christmas, is a beautiful event in history that we Christians observe with joy and great exuberance. What we have been celebrating is that moment in time, indeed we should say, in the fullness of time, when God entered the world, taking upon himself our flesh and being born as a human being.

He did not give up any of his Divinity; yet, he became perfect man in the Person of Jesus Christ, his Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

In Jesus Christ, the world would be reconciled to God, that is, all of creation, and we, in particular, who have been made in God's Image.

This was an act of love demonstrating the true Nature of Almighty God: that he is Perfect Love.

From the very moment of the Conception of our Lord through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the process of reconciliation began.

Scripture, in particular St. Luke's Gospel, provides a most beautiful description of our Lord's First Coming. That moment is forever written in our minds and in our hearts.

The Collect for this Sunday is the same as for Christmas Day. Written by Archbishop Cranmer for the 1549 Prayer Book, this Collect is one of the most theological in its content, bringing together the whole of the doctrine of the Trinity and Incarnation in just a few words:

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit.

In the Collect are three themes woven together: the Incarnation linked to our rebirth; the eternal Sonship of Christ in contrast to our adoption; and the historic birth of our Lord at a time and place.

As such, the Collect ties together the Epistle and Gospel lessons for today, which bring into focus that momentous event we have just celebrated: the Nativity of our Lord.

With the Gospel passage from St. Matthew, we are reminded that the Son of God entered into our world at a specific time and in a specific place. We might say that it is an empirical event of history, in that Jesus was born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph of the house and lineage of David. We might even go so far as to speculate that this event occurred in the year 7 B.C., that is, according to the latest calculations.

Furthermore, Matthew's passage serves as a witness to the Divinity of Jesus, recounting the words of the Angel, ***that what is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.***

As we turn to the Epistle passage, St. Paul, in his Letter to the Galatians, impresses upon us that the Incarnation of our Lord was a purposeful act. Before Jesus Christ, we were in bondage under the Law; but when the appointed time came, God sent His Son to be born under the Law, so that we, through Him, might be freed from that bondage, and made heirs of the salvation that becomes rightfully ours as children of God.

Our Lord, through His Incarnation, became subject to human conditions; but perhaps equally significant is that He became subject also to the Jewish Law, an all-encompassing legal system that evolved from the Ten Commandments, and from what is referred to as the Mosaic Law.

In Him, the Law was fulfilled that we might be redeemed, better yet, reconciled to God through Christ's Life and Death.

That redemption, or reconciliation, could not come about if Christ had not possessed both a human nature and a Divine Nature. If He could not have shed His Blood to wash us of our sins, the reconciliation could not have been accomplished.

We are indeed washed of our sins and made regenerate, reborn as adoptive children of God through baptism, through which we become inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven, and joint heirs with Christ.

This adoption is by Grace. Our reconciliation through the Incarnation is a gift of God. There is nothing we can do to earn it. It is freely given.

But, and here's the catch, we must accept it; we must receive it into ourselves.

God, through his Son Jesus Christ, has done all the work. The rest is up to us: accept God's Grace and Love; submit ourselves to Him; return the love that he extends to us.

How do we do that?

Indeed, how do we accept something so freely given? How do we accept unconditional love, the Divine Love poured out for us through Jesus Christ?

We do that by emulating the Life of Jesus, His Apostles, and the saints who followed Him throughout the ages.

We emulate His humility, His compassion, His faith in the Father, and His love for all of creation.

....Grant that we being regenerate, and made children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit....

With His Ascension into Heaven, our Lord paved the way for the Holy Spirit to dwell not only within the Church, but also within each of us, engendering us with spiritual gifts that sustain and empower us as Christians.

It is because God so loved the world, that is all of his creation, and sent his Son as an instrument of our reconciliation, that we can be filled with his Love and his Grace, and attain to that inheritance as his adopted children.

The beauty of that First Coming of our Lord, the scene of His Nativity so vividly described by St. Luke, and recounted by St. Matthew, lives eternally in our hearts. May its beauty also be reflected in our lives by our words and deeds, by our commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and by accepting God's Love and Grace into our hearts that it may be reflected in our lives. What better gift can we give God than to return His Love, and accept His Grace.

One of the ways we do this is in the Holy Eucharist when we, led by the priest, offer ourselves as Holy and Living Sacrifices, together with our Lord who in Heaven joins the offering of Himself to our offering in a most wonderful mystery.

Then, to complete the mystery, He feeds us and nourishes us with a Heavenly Banquet, with the love poured out for us on the Cross.

Indeed, the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is that singular act of reconciliation we celebrate in each and every celebration of the Holy Eucharist. That singular act of love that began when the blessed Virgin Mary replied to the Angel, ***Be it unto me according to thy word.***