

Hymns: 629, 14, 20, 633, 33, 634,

Psalm: 110:1-4.

P The LORD has said to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand,
C **until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet!”**
P The LORD will send forth Your mighty sceptre,
C **from Zion. Rule in the middle of Your enemies!**
P Your people will be volunteers in the day of Your armed power. In holy majesty,
C **from the womb of the dawn, the dew of Your youth belongs to You.**
P The LORD has sworn an oath and will not relent;
All **“You are a priest for ever like Melchizedek.”**

Collect: O God, You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Your only-begotten Son. Grant that we joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our Judge; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Isaiah 7:10-14

Epistle: 1John 4: 7-16

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25.

Preface:

For in the mystery of the Word made flesh, Thou hast given us a new revelation of Thy Glory;-- that, seeing Thee in Person of thy Son, we may be drawn to the love of those things which are not seen;---
Therefore with ---

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon this morning is written in the book of Matthew 1:18-25, which was our gospel reading before.

18 This is how Jesus Christ was born. His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph. However, before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph, her husband, was an honourable man and, because he did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her secretly. 20 After Joseph had thought about it, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take your wife Mary home with you! For what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you shall name Him ‘Jesus’! For He will save His people from their sins.”

22 All this happened to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “Look! The virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and they will name Him ‘Immanuel’” (which is translated, “God-With-Us”).

24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did what the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He took Mary home as his wife, 25 but did not have relations with her until she gave birth to a Son. Joseph gave Him the name “Jesus.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

The vast, historic plan of the Almighty God plays itself out in the earthly drama of an unwed pregnancy.

In those days, what we call engagement was seen as a binding contract. Solemn promises were made, and Joseph and Mary were considered husband and wife. Yet they didn't live together yet, or share a home until the wedding night.

After the solemn vows, but before the wedding day, Mary is found to be pregnant. This circumstance usually causes shouts of scandal and shame. Mary, who had been known as a young woman of pure virtue, to the community she would have been seen to be a loose woman.

Joseph, at first, didn't know that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and that her Child was the Son of God. Joseph didn't want to continue with the marriage. Given the facts as he knew them, he was correct. Yet the facts were not as he knew them **and, because he did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her secretly..**

So Joseph was going to proceed to divorce Mary, breaking the betrothal. Yet Joseph is compassionate, and decides to do it quietly, so as to spare Mary as much scandal as he can.

But the Lord steps in. He sends His angel to give the message to Joseph. Now Joseph knows as well. The Saviour from sin resides in the Virgin's womb. Already as a Child in His mother, He is Immanuel, God with us.

Here is our salvation taking place. The Blessed Virgin conceives and bears a son. He is conceived by no man, but by the Holy Spirit, as we confess in the Creed. He is truly God's Son, yet also truly the Virgin's Son.

He is one of us, living our life, experiencing the same things as we do. He is fully human, so that He can bear our load of sin and be our Saviour. Only one of the sons of Adam can atone for all the sins of Adam's line. That's Jesus, Son of Mary, only He can be our representative before God the Father. He was conceived in Mary in order to begin to fulfill the whole law of God in our place. He was born so that we could be born again.

So the eternal, immortal God lay in the manger on this night. The Creator slumbered in the midst of beasts that He had created. He who had no beginning began His human life in Bethlehem, so that we could have new life.

Sometimes we ask: - What was wrong with the old life? Many people in the world would think there's nothing actually wrong with humanity. There are those who say: - We're just fine, and any God who would condemn us is too judgmental for our taste.

But there is something very wrong with our human lives. We were created in the beginning in the image of God. We should be born in holiness and righteousness, in a perfect relationship with God and everyone around us. But it doesn't take much observation to realize that we are not in harmony with everyone around us. We may think that we are in a good relationship with God, but usually that's said when people decide for themselves what they feel a relationship with God is. God doesn't agree with such sentiments, as His Word clearly declares.

No, we are not born in holiness and righteousness. As the Psalmist King David sang, **"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."** [Psalm 51:5.] These words are true of all men. We were conceived in the most scandalous and shameful fashion. We were born in the corruption and decay of sin. We were conceived in the image of fallen mankind. We were born spiritually dead.

Our births, the most scandalous of all, are about as opposite as you can get from the birth of Christ. Although people who didn't understand surely whispered about Mary and her pregnancy as being suspect, but it was the most pure and glorious birth in history. By God the Holy Spirit, He was conceived. He didn't inherit a sinful flesh from His Father, since God was His Father. Nor was His humanity corrupted by His mother. Although she was surely as sinful as all of us, yet God overshadowed her. By His holiness He took humanity into the Godhead, without sin. By His grace, He conceived His Son to be perfect Man, pure and inviolate, overflowing with goodness and love.

We, imperfectly conceived and born in sin, overflow with impurity and transgression.

We often lack compassion. Saint Joseph, our example in the text, shows us a sympathetic heart that did not want to crush poor Mary. But we sinners don't always love like this. Often, people kick people when they are down. Often, they whisper behind their backs. Often, they take joy in their hearts when others fall.

Sometimes, they perform shameful and scandalous acts. They are sometimes secret acts that no one sees, although they can't always hide their sins from others.

Sometimes we don't want to admit before others either what sinners we are. We don't even want to admit to ourselves what sinners we are. Our shamefulness runs deep, to the very core of our being. Because we are conceived and born in sin, our human nature is corrupted. The image of God in us is shattered beyond any human repair.

Yet God our Lord has the power to repair the image. For this reason He sent His Son into our human flesh. He, by His absolute holiness, acted out righteousness by His every thought, word, and deed. Then He offered up His entire life as a sacrifice without any blemish or spot. As He was born in the midst of animals and laid in the manger they ate from, so He was born to be a sacrifice as the animals of the Old Covenant. As He was visited by shepherds who kept watch over their flocks by night, so He was born to be the Lamb of God, whose Blood was shed for our redemption.

So Christmas is the Day when the Lord of all stepped forth from His pure and kingly hall. This is His compassion, His sympathy with the shame of our lowly state.

Yet what if we decide that we don't need a Saviour? What if we think that we're not that bad? Perhaps flawed, perhaps prone to mistakes, but surely, we might think, we're not wretched and lowly.

If that's our attitude, then Christ and Christmas won't mean much. The lights and the presents will be only external trappings intended to create a feeling inside us. Goodwill toward men will be only what we can muster for ourselves, or what some watered-down deity from our imagination feels towards us.

But the true Deity, the God who became Man, is here today. Let us be humble and repentant before Him. We truly rejoice with great joy at His presence, for He has come among us again, the true Immanuel. God is with us to give us His redeeming Word. He comes among us with His true Body and Blood to eat and to drink. The Saviour born in Bethlehem has completed His course and achieved His victory for us. He pours out today His gifts in this house, better than any Santa Claus distributing gifts from a sack. The gifts of this house are eternal, because they give salvation and life that does not end.

For all who repent and believe on this Son from heaven, His life is yours. He gives Himself freely to you. New birth is yours, pure and immaculate, in His Blood. He has exalted our human state by His redemption, so that now we are the sons of God, in the image of the pure Son, the Child of the Virgin. And His Spirit, who has given you new birth, keep you in this faith and repentance. Amen. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen**

3rd Hymn: 20,

Prayer of the Church Christmas Eve 2017

P Let us pray for the people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

P Lord God Almighty, we come before You on this most holy day in awe at the wonder and majesty of the incarnation. The Saviour of the nations has come, and with joy we greet our newborn King. Let the proclamation of His birth sound forth throughout the world. Give to Your Church faithful pastors to proclaim the good tidings of His birth, and give to Your people willing ears to hear and believe. Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P In the birth of Your Son, You have signalled the beginning of a new creation; while we still live in a world wracked by the ravages of sin, we know that the final victory is Yours. Watch over and keep safe emergency workers, our Police and our Armed Forces, and all whose vocations make them absent from their families this evening so that they can look out for the well-being of our families. Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P In the birth of Your Son, You have visited and redeemed Your people. Continue to visit those who are lonely, sick, recovering or near death. Let Your presence be a comfort to them, and give them perseverance until that time You grant healing, relief, deliverance and peace. Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P In the birth of Your Son, You have made a new family out of all humanity. Keep us ever mindful that Jesus is for all people, and give us opportunity to tell others the good news of His coming so that they can join in the praise of Your holy name. Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P In the birth of Your eternal Son, who is of one substance with You, You visited mankind, and so Your eternal Godhead is bound to the body and blood He gives us in the Sacrament of the Altar. Grant faith to all who receive this gift, so that with sins forgiven and love strengthened they can serve their neighbour in joy.

Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P In the birth of Your Son, You have called people of all times and places into the Body of Christ that is the Church. We give You thanks for all the believers who have gone before us, especially those who have been with us during Christmases past and are now with You. Give us a sure confidence in Your promise of resurrection and eternal life, and bring us at last together with them into Your presence at the full coming of Your Kingdom. Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Into Your hands, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

4th Hymn: 633,