
PRAYER xxi (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xix (CIPBC 1963).

² Isaiah 1: 1-20 (KJV).

³ St. John 3: 1-21 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 3: 3 (RSV).

⁵ Genesis 2: 15—3: 24.

⁶ Isaiah 1: 4 (RSV).

⁷ Genesis 3: 17-19 (RSV).

⁸ Isaiah 1: 11 (RSV).

⁹ St. John 3: 2. (RSV).

¹⁰ St. John 3: 3 (RSV).

¹¹ Article IX “Of Original or Birth-Sin”, *The Articles of Religion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 604 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹² Article XVIII “Of obtaining eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ”, *ibid.* 606.

¹³ St. John 3: 16-17 (RSV).

¹⁴ Article XII “Of Good Works”, *op. cit.* 605.

¹⁵ Priest Assistant, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, Metairie LA; Honorary Canon, the Diocese of the Resurrection; Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.

Sermon for Morning Prayer The First Sunday in Advent

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz [EH-moss], which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah [uzz-EYE-uh], Jotham [DGAH-thamm], Ahaz [EH-hazz], and Hezekiah [hezz-ek-EYE-uh], kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

“Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

“Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bul-

locks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

“Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.³

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus [**nick-oh-DEE-muss**], a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus [**nick-oh-DEE-muss**] saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the king-

Conclusion:

It is easy, and very natural, for us to look at Advent as merely a long, contemplative waiting for the colorful, joyful Christmas festivities, with all their familiar and heart-warming features such as the innocent baby, the triumphant angels, and the amazed shepherds. So, too, it is easy, and very common, for us to overlook the deeper significance of Advent as the lens through which we should be focusing our gaze.

Firstly, we must look at the birth of the Redeemer but secondly, through that birth, we must concentrate upon His death, which is the mystical but very real means by which our separation from God may be overcome. Thirdly, we must recall Jesus's institution of Baptism as the means by which we are reborn into Him, which makes us capable of receiving the benefits of His death and sacrifice.

And, fourthly, and finally, we must constantly ask ourselves, as baptized persons who have been reborn into Him, how we are called by Him to live and what we are called by Him to do as people newly reunited with God. For you may be sure that His sacrifice was not intended as a mere academic exercise but, instead, as the XIIth Article of Religion teaches us, was intended to produce from us good fruit.¹⁴

--oo0oo--

The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister¹⁵
November 28, 2010.

¹ *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 30 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON

of Our Lord's status as a divine messenger: "“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for on one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.””⁹

It is to this assertion that Jesus responds by referring implicitly to that long-standing separation between the human and the divine: "“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.””¹⁰ In doing so, Our Lord implies that even a divine mediator sent to bring mankind to God cannot bridge this separation unless there is first an essential change in mankind's basic nature to make it possible.

Where the original cause of our state of separation is, as the IXth Article of Religion tells us, our being born into a defective natural humanity,¹¹ so the XVIIIth Article tells us that it is only through being united with Christ that we are able to overcome that same state of separation.¹² It is in reference to this that, in today's Second Lesson, Our Lord tells Nicodemus that, having been born into estrangement from God, then to remedy that otherwise incurable estrangement he, and therefore also we, must now be *re*born into a new state of fellowship with God.

And when Nicodemus questions how such a rebirth can occur, Christ tells him that, in terms of Nicodemus's own chronology it will be accomplished – in our terms, coming as we do after the end of the New Testament story, it has already been accomplished – only through the means of Christ's own sacrifice of Himself upon Calvary:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”¹³

dom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus [*nick-oh-DEE-muss*] answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”⁴
In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

As we begin the new Church year with this season we call “Advent”, or “the Coming”, we are, of course, looking forward to what, in four weeks, will be our remembrance of Our Lord’s original Coming to us in the flesh, that is, the Incarnation, His birth in human form which we will celebrate on Christmas. And that original Coming itself brought to us the possibility of our becoming a new sort of person.

Theme:

You will recall from the account in Genesis of the Fall of man⁵ is that we were created as beings who were from the beginning in fellowship with God and that, through the corruption of our essential nature, we lost the ability to enter into that fellowship. So where we are, literally, naturally born into a state of separation from God, then it requires, again literally, *supernatural* intervention – that is, intervention from above and beyond the natural order of creation – to overcome that separation and enable us, once again, to be united to Him. And it is this *supernatural* birth into a new state that is capable of such fellowship that is the subject of today’s two Lessons.

Development:

In today’s First Lesson, Isaiah laments in no uncertain terms the decay and corruption of natural humanity:

“Ah, sinful nation,
a people laden with iniquity,
offspring of evildoers,

sons who deal corruptly!
They have forsaken the LORD,
they have despised the Holy One of Israel,
they are utterly estranged.”⁶

This is what we are, by our natures, born to, as Genesis tells us:

“Because you have ... eaten of the tree of which I
commanded you,
“You shall not eat of it,”
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil shall you eat of it all the days of your
life;
thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
in the sweat of your face
You shall eat bread
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken,
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”⁷

Nor can we overcome this loss of fellowship with God by pagan offerings and empty rites of worship, that is, by anything we are capable of doing on our own:

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
Says the LORD;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of he-goats.”⁸

It is this fundamental and, from the human perspective incurable, estrangement of God from mankind that is the subject of today’s Second Lesson. The colloquy between Christ and Nicodemus begins with Nicodemus’s recognition