

ty, in the form of a tiny baby. As we give joyful thanks for that birth, we must reflect that this seemingly minor event was the actual beginning of our reconciliation with God, of the healing of the breach between us that humanity's proneness to sin has always threatened to make permanent.¹¹

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister¹²
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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 31 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xx (CIPBC 1963).

² Zechariah 2: 10-13 (KJV).

³ Titus 2: 11--3: 7 (KJV).

⁴ Titus 2: 13-14 (RSV).

⁵ *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 238-239 (South Africa 1954).

⁶ St. Matthew 20: 28 (RSV).

⁷ St. Mark 10: 45 (RSV).

⁸ Galatians 1: 3b-4 (RSV).

⁹ Titus 2: 13a-14b (RSV).

¹⁰ Psalm 130: 8 (RSV).

¹¹ While the mass of humanity will never be so estranged from God that some few people may turn from their evil courses to accept the salvation He offers them, for any individual there is always the danger that too prolonged an immersion in sin may dull the moral faculties to the point where that person simply loses interest in God, and turns away from Him, and so is forever lost to Him.

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Sermon for Evening Prayer Christmas Eve

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Verse of the second Chapter of Zechariah.²

“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith [SETH] the LORD. And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the second Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Titus.³

“... For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing [SHOW-ing] all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy,

hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[A]waiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

An essential part of the Gospel message is that, as the order for the Eucharist tells us, our Lord Jesus Christ “(by his one oblation of himself once offered) made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world...”⁵ This is the doctrine of the Atonement.

While Christians may argue, and have argued, over the details of precisely how Christ has satisfied our debt of sin, and over why it was necessary for Him to do so, no legitimate Christian has ever denied that He in fact did just this, or that He did it for us, or that He did it as His own free gift to us, unmerited by anything we might have done for ourselves.

The reason I am so bold as to state that no legitimate Christian can contest these truths is that the core of them is clearly set forth in Scripture. Galatians 1: 4 Thus St. Matthew’s Gospel declares that “[T]he Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁶ Saint Mark’s Gospel states that “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁷

St. Paul summarizes these teachings to the Galatians with his words, “[O]ur Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...”⁸ So anyone who attempts to controvert this doctrine is effectively giving the lie to canonical Scriptures which the universal Church has, by placing them in its Canon, declared to be inspired by God for our instruction.

No one who denies the authority of Scripture has any legitimate claim to the title “Christian” although today there are certainly all too many people who do both of those inconsistent things.

When Paul tells Titus that “Jesus Christ ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity”,⁹ he is saying that Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of the of the Psalmist’s prediction:

“O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plenteous redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.”¹⁰

Conclusion:

So tonight we celebrate the enfleshing, or from the Latin, “Incarnation”, of God, the Second Person of the Trini-