

The Lessons Of the Birth of Christ

SERMON
PREACHED
BY
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AT
ST. ANN'S
CHURCH,
MONTREAL.

Mary brought forth her first born Son, and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger. Luke 2:7.

"The feast of the gracious birth of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. From the year 5199 after the creation of the world, when God in the beginning created heaven and earth, 2957 from the deluge, 2015 from the birth of Abraham, 1510 from Moses and the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt, 1032 from the anointment of David as king, in the 46th week, according to the prophecy of Daniel, in the 194th Olympiad, in the 752nd year after the building of the city of Rome, and the 42nd of the reign of the Emperor Augustus, when there was peace throughout the whole world, in the sixth age, Jesus Christ, Eternal God, Son of the Eternal Father, when He would sanctify the world by His most blessed Advent, was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and nine months after His conception was born at Bethlehem, Judea, of Mary the Virgin and became man."

With these solemn words, my brethren, the Church announces the birth of Jesus Christ in the Roman Martyrology. In this announcement, two particular circumstances are mentioned, which deserve our attention, and which we will consider this evening for our instruction and edification, namely: The time of Our Lord's birth and the place in which the happy event occurred.

The Nativity of Christ falls within the time foretold by the Prophets.

The Patriarch Jacob mentioned the time of the coming of the Redeemer when he said: "The sceptre shall not be taken away from Juda, nor a ruler from his thigh till he comes that is to be sent, and he shall be the expectation of nations." According to this prophecy the Redeemer was to come when the sceptre would have departed from Juda, that is to say, when the Jews, having lost their independence, would no longer be governed by a king from the tribe of Juda. This prophecy has been fulfilled in Christ, for when he was born the Jews were under the dominion of the Roman Emperor. Herod was not a descendant of Juda, but an Idumean. The Jews themselves acknowledge that they had no king, for they said to Pilate: "We have no King but Caesar."

The prophet Daniel mentions, even the year in which the Messiah would appear and accomplish the work of the Redemption. The Archangel Gabriel appeared and declared to him, that from the time when, by order of a king, Jerusalem and the temple should be rebuilt, to the public life of Christ sixty-nine weeks of years, that is, four hundred and eighty-three years, should elapse; after which the Redeemer would be put to death and those that denied him would perish, and that a strange people with their leader would destroy Jerusalem with its temple; finally, that in the seventieth week, namely, after the death of the Redeemer, the sacrifices of the Old Law would cease and the Kingdom of the Jews have an end. This prophecy was fulfilled to the very letter; for from the time when by the command of the Persian King, Artaxerxes, Jerusalem was rebuilt to the time of the public life of Christ, exactly sixty-nine weeks of years, or four hundred and eighty-three years elapsed. In the middle of the seventieth week of years, that is, after three years and a half, Christ died upon the cross, the Old Law ceased and the New began. After the seventieth week of years, that is, after four hundred and ninety years, the Romans, under their leader Titus, destroyed Jerusalem, and put an end to the Jewish Kingdom. Thus Christ, even at his birth gave a proof of His Divinity and His dignity as Messiah, as he was born at the very time foretold by the prophets.

As we read in the Gospel of Christ, the Roman Emperor Augustus

had sent out a decree that the whole world should be enrolled. This enrollment comprised two things: The number of the inhabitants, and the property of each individual. Here, again, the Providence of God manifests itself. According to the prophecy of Micah, the Saviour was to be born in Bethlehem. Now Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, and had no occasion whatever for going to Bethlehem, which was a journey of several days' distance from Nazareth, and especially at a time when Mary was near her delivery.

But see, the Roman Emperor without being aware of it, co-operated with the designs of God, that the prophecy might be fulfilled. Since the enrollment was to be made at the place to which one's tribe belonged, and as Mary and Joseph were descendants of the house of David at Bethlehem, they were obliged to make their way there in order to be enrolled according to the decree of Augustus Caesar. Thus the emperor, a pagan, assisted unconsciously in bringing about the birth of Our Savior at Bethlehem. Recognize, my dear brethren, the wisdom of God, which, without the will and knowledge of men, often guides their action, according to His holy designs.

The birth of Christ, at the time of the enrollment of the whole world teaches us that He came to redeem all men. The Jews thought that to them alone, as the chosen people, all blessings and graces would be given. Even Peter had to be instructed by a vision that the Gentiles also were to be made partakers of the blessed fruit of the Redemption. Let us today, my brethren, give thanks to God that he had called our forefathers, who were pagans, and consequently us also, to Christianity, and let us prove ourselves worthy of this grace by a pious Christian life; let us live so that Christ may not be for our ruin but for our resurrection.

Christ was born during the time of peace throughout the whole world, for when he was born the temple of Janus, the god of war, was closed in token that peace reigned all over the Roman Empire.

Why did He choose this time of universal peace?

In order to manifest Himself at His very entrance into the world, as the Prince of Peace, foretold by the prophets "A child is born for us, and a Son is given to us; and the government is upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace. His empire shall be spread abroad, and there shall be no end of peace." The angels also, on the plains of Bethlehem, announced him as the Prince of Peace, when they sang "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will."

He chose the time of peace to indicate that he was coming to bring peace to man. He established peace with God, rendering a satisfaction to Him for our sins, reconciling us with Him, and recovering for us His grace and love; peace with ourselves, by taking away sin, the source of all discord, and meriting for us the grace to conquer our evil inclinations, whereby we preserve interior peace; peace with our neighbor by uniting all men through the bond of religion, and by giving them the commandment to love one another as brothers and sisters.

He chose the time of peace to show us that He loves peace above all things and rewards the peaceful in this world and in the world to come. Therefore, He charged His disciples "into whatsoever house you enter first say 'Peace be to this house,' and if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon him, but if not, it shall return to you. He also praised peace-makers, saying "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." How is it with you my dear brethren? Have you this peace which Jesus Christ brought to man? Are you at peace with God and with yourselves? Are you in the state of grace? Does not your conscience reproach you with sins for which you have not, perhaps, truly repented, which you have not properly confessed and amended? Do you live in peace with your neighbor? Is there no enmity, aversion, hatred in your heart? If you do not possess this peace, endeavor to obtain it during this holy season by making a good confession and being sincerely reconciled with your neighbor.

Christ came in the night-time—Why? Because before His birth men were sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. The Gentiles were sunk in the abomination of idolatry and were so blinded that they worshipped the gods by murder, impurity and other vices. Even among the Jews many errors prevailed: their worship was for the most part exterior, a nutshell without a kernel, wherefore God said of them, "This people glorify me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." The birth of Christ at midnight symbolizes the night of error and sin in

which men were languishing, and reminds us that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Hence Isaiah says: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen," and St. John in one of today's Gospels calls the Divine Savior "the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world." Let us take to heart the words of the Apostle and walk as children of the light.

Our Blessed Lord chose Bethlehem for his birth-place. Why? First of all, to fulfil the prophecy of Micah, who indicates Bethlehem as the birthplace of Christ. "And thou, Bethlehem, Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda; out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel." The Jews understood this prophecy concerning Christ, for in answer to Herod's question where Christ was to be born, the Scribes replied at once: In Bethlehem, and quoted for it the passage which I have just given from Micah. From this it follows that the Jews very distinctly recognized Bethlehem as the birth-place of the promised Messiah, and if Christ had been born elsewhere the Jews could have refused to believe Him, and with reason, because the prophecy of Micah would not have been fulfilled in Him.

He chose Bethlehem in order to humble Himself at His very entrance into the world. Bethlehem was a small place, scarcely numbering a thousand inhabitants, and, therefore, without respect in the eyes of the world. Christ wished to be born there, in order to show us the way in which He would accomplish our Redemption. It was pride that made man refuse obedience to God, and that plunged him into misery. Perdition had its origin in pride. In order, then, to avert from man the ruin which pride had brought on him, Jesus wished to humble Himself most profoundly, and therefore to be born at Bethlehem. By the humility which He manifested even at His coming into this world, He wanted to show us the manner in which we were to apply to ourselves the fruits of the Redemption and work out our salvation.

"Amen. I say unto you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." He even proposes Himself as a model of humility and exhorts us to follow Him. "Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls." Let us then be humble in heart, in word and in deed.

He chose Bethlehem in order to be for us what the word Bethlehem signifies, that is a house of bread. Jesus is really the true bread; for as earthly bread nourishes the body, and strengthens and preserves life, so Jesus nourishes us and preserves in us the life of grace through the Holy Spirit. He says of Himself: "I am the bread of life, he that cometh to Me shall not hunger." Jesus Christ is that wonderful bread which he gives us in the Most Holy Sacrament. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever." Thus the birth of Christ at Bethlehem is an invitation to visit Jesus often in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, to adore Him with the most profound veneration, and as often as possible, and with a heart well prepared to receive Him in Holy Communion.

He was born in a stable. Why? St. Luke tells us, because there was no room for them in the inns. Mary and Joseph arrive at Bethlehem, the day is drawing to a close and night is coming on. They seek an inn; the town is full of people, it being the time of registration. There is no room for them at any of the inns; every place is occupied. How true are the words of St. John in the last Gospel. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." On this mysterious night He could scarcely find a place whereon to lay His head. But why could Mary and Joseph not find room in any of the inns of Bethlehem? Probably for two reasons: Mary and Joseph belonged to the working class; their clothing as well as their whole appearance showed that they were poor people. They were therefore refused admission because the lowliness of their appearance showed plainly that no reward would likely be forthcoming for any hospitality shown them, nothing more than their thanks. If Jesus and Mary would come to you in their poverty looking for shelter, would you act as the people of Bethlehem? Certainly not, you would receive them with joy and treat them the best way possible. Very well, you know what Christ says: "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these, My least brethren, you did it to Me." When you assist poor, needy, helpless people, you assist Jesus, and your reward will not fail. Good people, generous parishioners of St. Ann's, your reward is

before you. "I myself," says Jesus, "will be your reward."

Mary and Joseph could not find room in the inns of Bethlehem for another reason, and that was Mary's delicate condition. They sought a lodging from place to place. Many might have been willing to receive them, but one glance at Mary immediately caused them to change their mind, for they feared she might be delivered while there, and cause them inconvenience; therefore, they were refused. For a similar reason Jesus is refused admittance even to-day. He asks for many things which are unpleasant and disagreeable to our sensuality. He wants us to deny ourselves and mortify our flesh: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." This is too hard for a great many; they cannot resolve to mortify their passions, to give up wicked company and to renounce this or that pleasure; they will not hear of imitating Christ. What blindness, on account of comparatively small and passing difficulties to renounce eternal salvation, and for fleeting pleasures to plunge oneself into eternal perdition?

The new-born Savior wished to be laid in a crib in order to verify the words of Israel: "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib." The ox and the ass were in the stable for shelter and the Infant King lay in the crib, warmed by the breath of the two animals, fulfilling the prophecy of Habakuk as the Septuagint version has it. "Thou shalt be born, O Lord, between two beasts." What do we understand, my dear brethren, by this? That the Jews and Gentiles both were represented in that cold stable; the ox represented the Jewish people who were under the yoke of the law, and the ass the Gentiles steeped in folly and idolatry. Jesus lying in the crib surrounded by the ox and the ass, signifies that he became man for the Redemption of the whole human race. In order to apply the graces of Redemption to all men, the Church today, as she has always done, still sends missionaries into all parts of the world to announce the Gospel to the Gentiles. Let us assist these messengers of the faith with our alms and our prayers.

He wished to be laid in a crib to remind us of the words of the Psalmist "Man, when he was in honor, did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them." In the course of time, men lowered themselves beneath the level of the brutes, yielding like animals to the desires of the flesh, losing all knowledge of God and all liking for higher things. Then it was that Christ appeared upon the earth in order, by His doctrine, example and grace, to rescue man from his depravity and to conduct him unto the path of truth and virtue. Thus paganism, with its abomination and vices, was vanquished and the Christian religion with all its consoling truths and admirable virtues was spread all over the earth.

He wished to lay in a crib to teach us that His Kingdom was not of this world; and by His example to encourage us to value earthly goods as naught and to seek for the things that are above. When the child of a king is born, a luxurious couch awaits him; even for the child of a laborer a soft, warm bed is prepared; the birds too, find a warm dwelling in their nests, but Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, the Lord of Heaven and earth, lies in a crib, upon hay and straw. Could He have preached His contempt of the world, at His entrance into mortal life in a more impressive manner?

Let me, then, exhort you, my brethren, to love the Child of Bethlehem who, in order to win our hearts, has given us such proofs of His love. Let us return love for love. Let us manifest it in our actions and constantly walk in the way of His commandments. Let us offer ourselves to Our Savior in grateful love without reserve, forever, so that we can say always and with truth: "Jesus, for thee, I live, Jesus, for thee, I die, Jesus, thine I am in life and in death." Amen.

A WISE PRACTISE.

Monthly Communion is the wise practice of those who are ordinary Catholics. Those who seek perfection go more frequently. What of those who go only once or twice a year? That is a hard question and the answer would not edify. — Exchange.

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The Pope on Gregorian Music.

Under date of Dec. 28, a despatch from Rome says:—

After long discussion with experts, principally with the famous composer, the Abbe Perosi, Director of the Sistine choir, Pope Pius X. has issued a note on the subject of sacred music in churches.

In this note, which appears in the "Osservatore Romano," His Holiness formulates rules for Church music, which recall the churches to a strict observance of the instructions issued by former Pontiffs.

The Pope, who is a passionate lover of music, condemns the transformation of liturgical music into compositions suitable for concerts.

The Pontiff is strongly in favor of the Gregorian chant, and he has ordered the Abbe Perosi to compose a Gregorian Mass for the centenary of St. Gregory the Great, next Easter.

This Mass will be conducted by the Abbe in the Chapel of St. Gregory, and will be participated in by five hundred singers.

By a pastoral issued eight years ago, when he was Patriarch of Venice, Pope Pius X. caused a controversy among Catholics and musicians throughout Europe and America. This controversy has been revived at intervals ever since, but when Cardinal Sarto was elected Pope there were few who remembered that it was he who began it.

It was left to a Madrid paper, the "Epoca," to recall the efforts of the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice to banish from the churches under his jurisdiction every form of music not strictly religious, and the "Epoca" in doing so made a prophecy, now fulfilled, to the effect that one of the first reforms instituted by the new Pontiff would be to restore to its rightful place the Gregorian chant.

The Pope's pastoral of eight years ago repudiated the "light, trivial, scenic, and profane" music, which, it said, was now common in so many churches.

Among the "irreligious abuses" specified were the alteration of the text of the liturgy to suit the individual fancy of the composer, the singing of the "Tantum Ergo" as a cavatina or aria, the use of instruments unsuited to the sacredness of a church, such as timbals, trombones, and the piano. In general the pastoral demanded the restoration to the liturgy of its original importance, making the musical accompaniment its "humble servant."

Knights of Columbus

Ottawa Council, No. 485, held a very successful initiation of 34 candidates last week. The first and second degrees were conferred on the evening of December 29th, by officers of Ottawa and Montreal Councils, and the third degree was exemplified on the following evening by District Deputy B. W. Lucy, of Ogdensburg, with a staff from that place, assisted by State Warden A. J. McCracken of Montreal. All the degrees were given in the Club building belonging to Ottawa Council, which is peculiarly adapted for this work. Over 100 visiting Knights were present, including several Grand Knights and other officers; and a very pleasant hour was spent in speech and song after the initiations had been completed.

A great honor was conferred on Ottawa Council this year, by His Excellency, Mgr. Suarretti, Apostolic Delegate, accepting their invitation to hold his New Year's reception in the parlors of their Club building. As the residence of the Delegate is situated in the extreme south end of this city, his predecessors had been accustomed to receive in the parlors of the Ottawa University, which was recently destroyed by fire. The Papal flag was displayed on the flagpole of the Club during the afternoon, and the interior of the building was beautifully decorated for the occasion.

DEATH OF FATHER DESHON.

Rev. Father George Deshon, Superior-General of the Missionary Order of St. Paul the Apostle, familiarly known as the Paulist Fathers, died early last Wednesday morning at the parent house of the Order, Columbus Avenue and 59th street, New York. His death was due to heart disease. He had been ill for about three weeks.

Father Deshon was one of the founders of the Order of which he

was the head. He was 81 years old. He was not ordained to the priesthood until he was nearing middle life, the original career for which he was intended having been that of a soldier.

Father Deshon was the last surviving founder of the Paulists. He was born in New London, Conn., of Huguenot stock. In his youth he was sent to the West Point Military Academy. He was graduated with distinction, and was for five years a professor in the institution. He was reared a Protestant, but became a Catholic in his early manhood.

In 1855 he was ordained a priest among the Redemptorists, and immediately after his ordination entered upon mission work. He remained exclusively in this work until his separation from the Redemptorists with the other four missionaries, Fathers Hecker, Hewitt, Baker and Walworth, who organized themselves into the Congregation of St. Paul, or the Paulist Fathers.—New York Freeman's Journal.

Notes for Farmers.

FEEDING.—Experience proves that it is best to water before feeding. If the horse is warm do not give him all he will take at once, but let the amount be divided, part when going to dinner, part after he has rested a little.

FERTILIZERS.—Commercial fertilizers may apparently answer the purpose for a short time, but soil fertility can only be maintained by stock-farming. In England stock-farming is the mainstay of the farmer, and land is worth twice as much as it is here. In the Island of Jersey land rents at about \$20 per acre; still, live-stock, especially dairy, farming is the main occupation.

POULTRY.—At this season, says an American writer, animal food must be supplied, as hens cannot procure it from any other source. When producing eggs, both the hen and the duck are greatly benefited by meat, and as meat from the butcher cannot always be conveniently had, a substitute may be found in the commercial ground meat, which is always thoroughly cooked before the fat is pressed out. It is sold in bags holding from 50 to 100 pounds, at about three cents a pound, one pound being mixed with the grain food of twenty hens three times a week, reducing the grain proportionately.

THE DAIRY.—In order to obtain the highest success in dairying we must know our business. There is no other business in which there are so many leaks as in the dairy business, and these leaks must be stopped or there will not be any profit. One poor cow will often eat up the profit of two good ones. There is no way to stop this but by keeping an individual record, that we may weed out unprofitable animals. The amount of work involved by keeping an exact record of each animal is more than the average farmer can afford to do, but he can weigh the milk one day each week and then average it up at the end of the month.

SEED CORN. both of sweet and field varieties, is a thing worth looking after this year. We can't afford to pay ten dollars a bushel for seed sweet corn, nor to hunt all over the neighborhood for a bushel or two of seed field corn, every spring, when we can just as well save our own in the fall.

THE MANURE should be hauled out during the winter about as fast as it is made. If put in small piles it will remain frozen through the winter and will thaw readily in the early spring, and the first rains will leach much of it into the ground. The rest should be scattered early. The ground will get the benefit of all of it, as it is not likely to lose much through chemical action and the throwing off of ammonia.

ST. BRIDGET'S NIGHT REFUGE.

Report for week ending Sunday, 3rd January, 1904.—Irish 167, French 145, English 26, Scotch and other nationalities 12. Total 349.

The largest university building in the world is that of St. Petersburg, which has a length of 1,000 feet.

Newfoundland is the greatest fishing country in the world. Two-thirds of its people are engaged in harvesting the ocean's wealth amidst the greatest perils.