



FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27TH, 2020

Conscience and Consciousness



He Qi: Nativity

Today we celebrate the second Sunday of the Christmas season. Luke's account of Jesus' birth last week, Christmas Day, was sunny, bright, awash with hope, as he declared the true bringer of peace, Jesus, *not* the Emperor of Rome, Augustus Caesar. Luke's story on Christmas morning, was a "theophany", the supreme appearance of God to human beings, replete with angels and even compliant, rustic, ruffian shepherds. Little wonder that the Christmas Story has been idealized and romanticized.

But now the Christmas crowds have gone and today, we move on in the Christmas narrative to a series of prophecies on the part of two figures, Simeon and Anna, both representing the Hebrew poor. Simeon first praises God, recognising in Jesus, God's work in history, but then turns to the reality that the one who brings peace to a broken world, will himself suffer. Anna, for her part, focuses upon Jesus as the bringer of liberation. For neither Simeon nor Anna, is this liberation something to be spiritualised away, to be reduced to individual peace or heaven after death. Rather, it fits with the prayer that Jesus later taught, the "Our Father". 'Your kingdom come' means to pray for good news for the poor of every land (6:20-21), hence our continuation with the Christmas Bowl today.

OUR GATHERING

Welcome

In the name of the Father
 In the name of the Son
 In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

**Let's Sing: Hark the Herald Angels Sing (TIS 303, Mendelssohn,
 Charles Wesley)**

Prayers of Preparation

In this prayer I try to evoke the sense of the journey back to reality. Christmas is a high point of Christian faith, one of the "high feasts", and in it, we sort of find ourselves immersed in a narrative that takes us out of the immediate, as we are asked to reflect, to think, to pray. Today, we are still half-way between Christmas and the daily grind, but we seek to take the Christ with us into our daily living...hard as that may be.

If we miss you leaving the ceremony
 leaving your naming' leaving the process of purification
leaving the prayers and the songs;

if we miss you leaving the festival
 returning to the stresses and pressures
 returning to demands and deadlines
returning to the everyday routines

we can find you in places of peacefulness
 we can find you where wisdom is spoken
 we can find you where holiness is nurtured
we can find you where God's love is shared

and we will find you back with us in our travels
 we will find you still with us at home
 we will find you growing stronger within us
your grace embracing us, our hearts your own

Amen

The Peace

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Isaiah 61:10-62:3 (Good News Translation)

Today's reading continues the readings from 'Third Isaiah' which we had in Advent and as an alternate reading on Christmas Day. The time is post-Exile, sometime after about 520BCE, and the place is Jerusalem. The prophet is rejoicing because of the restoration of Israel after the release from exile in Babylon. In v. 10 the prophet speaks as one released to enjoy the promises of God to restore the people. But the prophet's joy is of a particular character: not focused on vindication with the overthrowing of oppressors, but rather it is the joy that arises through bringing virtue into action. Not only have the people been delivered, but they have been changed in the process. Liberation has led to deeper, thoughtful consciousness of what they are called to become.

¹⁰ Jerusalem rejoices because of what the LORD has done.

She is like a bride dressed for her wedding.

God has clothed her with salvation and victory.

¹¹ As surely as seeds sprout and grow,

The Sovereign LORD will save his people,

And all the nations will praise him.

62 I will speak out to encourage Jerusalem;

I will not be silent until she is saved,

And her victory shines like a torch in the night.

² Jerusalem, the nations will see you victorious!

All their kings will see your glory.

You will be called by a new name,

A name given by the LORD himself.

³ You will be like a beautiful crown for the LORD.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Luke 2:22-40 (Good News Translation)

After Christmas Day, we move on a few years, to the practical realities of the Holy Family living as observant Jews. The reading involves the family's subjection to Judaism's purity laws – Jesus' circumcision and naming and Mary's ritual purification. Within that context, we also hear from both Simeon and Anna, both prophets. From Simeon, we hear two songs of praise: the first the so-called *Nunc Dimittis* – meaning "now you dismiss" (vs 29-32) and then Simeon's second oracle, which concerns the future of Jesus, whose life has barely begun (vs 34c-35). The first, the *Nunc Dimittis* is Simeon's praise of God, as he sees on Jesus the Messiah and who claims that he can now die in peace. The second oracle is somewhat darker, anticipating that the bringer of peace will have to contend with the apparent contradiction of division. Anna, the other prophet, represents the Hebrew poor, the *anawim* (as does Mary): the people who faithfully wait upon God for their liberation from oppression

and suffering. This reading is all about expectation of freedom for the world in Jesus: a deepening of our consciousness and conscience.

²² The time came for Joseph and Mary to perform the ceremony of purification, as the Law of Moses commanded. So, they took the child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, ²³ as it is written in the law of the Lord: "Every first-born male is to be dedicated to the Lord." ²⁴ They also went to offer a sacrifice of a pair of doves or two young pigeons, as required by the law of the Lord.

²⁵ At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him ²⁶ and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. ²⁷ Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple to do for him what the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God:

²⁹ "Now, Lord, you have kept your promise,
and you may let your servant go in peace.

³⁰ With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples:

³² A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles
and bring glory to your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother were amazed at the things Simeon said about him. ³⁴ Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against ³⁵ and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart."

³⁶⁻³⁷ There was a very old prophet, a widow named Anna, daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She had been married for only seven years and was now eighty-four years old.^[a] She never left the Temple; day and night she worshipped God, fasting and praying. ³⁸ That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had finished doing all that was required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were upon him.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Christ

Carol: The Virgin Mary (TiS 307, The Virgin Mary, Anon, West Indies)

Some thoughts...

Let's Give our Offerings

Today we hear from Act for Peace, summarizing what these last Sundays during Advent and Christmas might mean if you give. If you have not given, why not do it today

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjT1WzjgZEE&list=PLqrYzj1veb8faFEIgLNXruF666AbNYBV8&index=7>

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
 praise him, all creatures here below,
 praise him above, ye heavenly host,
 praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

At this point we invite to offer prayers at home, ending each petition with the words, "In your incarnation", "Bring us your Kingdom".

Carol: Come thou long-expected Jesus (TiS 272, to the Tune Hyfrydol 217, Charles Wesley)

Blessing

You have come to us as a small child,
 but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts,
 the gift of love eternal
 Caress us with Your tiny hands,
 embrace us with Your tiny arms
 and pierce our hearts with Your soft, sweet cries.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ
Amen

Closing Verse: Joy to the World (TiS 268, Antioch, Isaac Watts) ...
He rules the world...

Postlude



The famous emblem of the Moravian Church, which enjoys a strong sympathy for pacifism. Read the homily which ends with the words above.