

CHRISTmas Eve – Lessons & Carols (12/24/11 – *The Blessed Birth of Our Savior*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy [LK 2.10], said the angel at ***The Blessed Birth of Our Savior***. Great indeed is the joy thus announced – greater than the human mind can conceive. Thus, we need to rehearse it every year – so that, little by little, the magnitude of this joy might begin to sink into our hearts.

It was a dreadful thing for us to lie under the holy wrath of God – to be led captive by the devil at his will ... and to be under the sentence of eternal condemnation because of our sin. More dreadful still is the fact that we are so often ignorant of our awful condition – indeed, are utterly indifferent to it ... yeah, even embrace it and make ourselves quite at home in it.

But now the angel brings good tidings that the Word has come into the world ... the eternal Son of God is come in human flesh ... to free us from all these evils. He came as the GREAT PHYSICIAN to us who are by our own conception and birth spiritually sick. He came as the REDEEMER to us who were captives of sin. He came as the WAY to us who like sheep had gone astray. He came as the LIFE to us who are naturally dead in our trespasses and sins. He came as SAVIOR to us who were lost in darkness.

As Moses was sent by the Lord to deliver the Israelites from their bondage to Egypt [EXO 3.10], so Christ was sent by the Father to redeem mankind from our bondage to the devil. And as the dove brought back an olive leaf to Noah in the ark after the waters of the flood had abated from the face of the earth [GEN 8.11], so Christ came to earth to preach and bring about peace and reconciliation between God and sinners.

Well may we rejoice, then, and magnify the mercies of our God! What good thing will He – Who loved us while we were yet His enemies [ROM 5.8] – withhold from those who are partakers of Him of the same flesh? For He Who is of the substance of the eternal Godhead did not scorn taking our human nature into the very closest union with His divinity. Who has ever

hated His own flesh [EPH 5.29]? How can He possibly cast us off, when by an act of such exalted and infinite mercy, God has made **us** partakers of His **Own** nature by taking **our** nature into **Himself**?

Who in most exalted thought can take hold of this stupendous mystery? *And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us* [JN 1.14]. Much less are we able to express it adequately in words ... this side of heaven. Here we have that which is most exaltedly sublime and that which is most vilely base. Here is the greatest power and the most miserable helplessness. In *The Blessed Birth of Our Savior*, we behold the most glorious majesty amidst most inglorious weakness. What can be more sublime than God, or viler than man? Who has more power than God, or greater moral helplessness than man? Who can be so glorious as God, or so weak as man? The two are utterly incompatible!

Yet that sublime Power devises a plan of redemption, which unites all these elements, when infinite justice required such a union. What finite mind can grasp the greatness of this mystery? An adequate ransom, infinite in value, was required for man's offense, because man had turned himself away from God the infinite Good. But what could adequately satisfy an infinite God? Therefore, infinite Justice takes from Itself, as it were, an adequate satisfaction offered by Itself, and God the Creator suffers in human flesh, lest man – the work of His hands – should suffer eternally. Infinite Good was offended, and no one but a Mediator of infinite power could intercede for us. And who is infinite but God alone? Thus, God reconciled the world unto Himself [2COR 5.19]. God **Himself** became the Mediator. God **Himself** redeemed humanity **with His Own Blood** [ACTS 20.28]!

Who can understand this marvelous mystery? The almighty Creator had been offended, and yet the creature – **we!** – who committed the offense showed no anxiety for reconciliation. And He Who had been offended assumes our flesh to make reconciliation for us! Man had forsaken God, and allied himself to the devil, God's bitter enemy; and yet He, Who had been thus deserted, seeks the deserter with tender concern, and most

graciously begs us to return to Him again! Man had gone away from infinite Goodness itself, and had fallen into infinite depths of evil; but that very same infinite Goodness, having paid an infinite price for our redemption, rescues us from those infinite depths of evil.

O, how greatly this infinite mercy exceeds the highest thought of our finite human minds! Christ has brought to our poor human nature a greater glory than it lost by Adam's sin. In Christ we receive more than we lost in Adam. As the Prophet Isaiah declares, we have *received from the LORD's hand double for all [our] sins* [ISA 40.2]. Where sin had abounded, divine grace has much more abounded [ROM 5.20]. In Adam we lost our original innocence. But in Christ we receive a full and completed righteousness [ROM 5.18]. Some may justly regard the power of God as wonderful, but still more wonderful is His grace – although ... so far as God is concerned, they are equally wonderful, since both are infinite and infinitely good. Others may admire only the wondrous power of God in creation; still more may we admire the marvels of His grace in redemption – although both creation and redemption alike show forth His infinite power.

It was a great thing to create man in the first place, when, as yet not existing, we deserved neither good nor ill at God's hands. But to redeem man, when we justly merited condemnation, and to take upon Himself the punishment due for our transgression, that is surely greater still! It is truly wonderful when we consider how God has formed us in our flesh and our bones. But it is still more wonderful to think how He was willing to **become** flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone to save us from sin [EPH 5.30].

Fittingly, then, do we sing praise to the God Who created us, when as yet we had no being. Rightly, then, do we sing hymns to the Savior Who redeemed us, when through sin we were under eternal condemnation. Joyously, then, do we sing carols to our Redeemer Who has prepared for us unspeakable bliss and glory, as by faith we cling to Christ and this night celebrate *The Blessed Birth of Our Savior*.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]