

Season of ADVENT



Prayers

Let us pray for the people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Collect of the Day

O God, You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that as we joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our Judge; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 110:1-4
(antiphon v. 2a)
Isaiah 7:10-14
1 John 4:7-16
Matthew 1:18-26

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 359
Other Hymns – 383 (OT), 362 (E),
361 (G), 373 (G), 376 (G), 363/365,
370

* Alternate Collect of the Day; Scripture Readings; and Hymns on the following page.

Lord God Almighty, we come before You on this most holy night in awe at the wonder and majesty of the incarnation. The Saviour of the nations has come, and with joy we greet our newborn King. Let the proclamation of His birth sound forth throughout the world. Give to Your Church faithful pastors to proclaim the good tidings of His birth, and give to Your people willing ears to hear and believe. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

In the birth of Your Son, You have signalled the beginning of a new creation; while we still live in a world wracked by the ravages of sin, we know that the final victory is Yours. Watch over and keep safe emergency workers and all whose vocations keep them from their families this evening for the well-being of our families. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

In the birth of Your Son, You have visited and redeemed Your people. Continue to visit those who are lonely, sick, recovering or near death. Let Your presence be a comfort to them, and give them perseverance until that time You grant healing, relief, deliverance and peace. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

In the birth of Your Son, and by His death and resurrection, You have reconciled the world to Yourself. Keep us ever mindful that Jesus is for all people, and give us opportunity to tell others the good news of His coming so that they can join in the praise of Your holy name. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

In the birth of Your eternal Son, who is of one substance with You, You visited mankind, and so Your eternal Godhead is bound to the body and blood He gives us in the Sacrament of the Altar. Grant faith to all who receive this gift, that with sins forgiven and love strengthened they can serve their neighbour in joy. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

In the birth of Your Son, You have called people of all times and places into the Body of Christ that is the Church. We give You thanks for all the believers who have gone before us, especially those who have been with us during Christmases past and are now with You. Give us a sure confidence in Your promise of resurrection and eternal life, and bring us at last together with them into Your presence at the full coming of Your kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Into Your hands, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our newborn Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Season of **ADVENT**

Collect of the Day

O God, You make this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that as we have known the mysteries of that Light on earth we may also come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 96

(antiphon v. 2)

Isaiah 9:2-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 358

Other Hymns – 360 (G), 363 (G),
368 (G), 380 (G), 393 (G), 364/365,
366, 377



ADVENT SERMON

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD / CHRISTMAS EVE DECEMBER 24 2020

Sermon Text: Luke 2:1-20

'Home For The Holidays'

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Homeless. Many people will be homeless again this Christmas. There will be no place for them to lay their heads this night. No tree for them to gather around. No table to feast at. No place to call “home.” And as we gather together with those we love this holy night, as we eat and drink and make merry; most of us won't have much time to spare for the homeless . . . let alone a few loonies or toonies to spare for them. And yet, this night is really all about the homeless.

To be sure, most of us probably think that the homeless are homeless by choice. Oh, we know that there are many homeless in our world who – on account of wars, disasters, famines, and other misfortune, and through no fault of their own – have no place to lay their heads. But those who line the streets of our cities with their hands out, who sleep on our park benches, who eat regularly from garbage bins, somehow seem responsible for their lot, don't they? Homeless by choice . . . homeless by their own fault.

Of course, it's easier for us that way. For then we don't have to feel as bad, as guilty, about passing them by. After all, if it were not for the alcohol . . . if it were not for the drugs . . . if it were not for their poor choices . . . if they would just get their lives together . . . if they would only actually try to find a job; then they would not be in such a mess. Which, in other words, means: if they were more like me maybe they would have what I have. Maybe they would then have a place to lay their head, a Christmas tree to gather around, a table to feast at. Maybe, yes, they would then have a home.

Homeless by choice . . . or homeless through no fault of their own? In many cases and in many ways, it is really both of these, isn't it? Many of the homeless have made choices that brought them to where they are; but why did they make those choices? Why haven't you made them? If you had been born when they were born . . . if you had lived where they lived . . . if you had been treated as they were treated . . . if you were mentally and emotionally traumatized as they were . . . would you have made a different choice? Perhaps; but, then, perhaps not.

Now, although you may have a warm bed to go home to this night . . . a Christmas tree to gather around . . . a table to feast at with family members; do you know what? You, too, are homeless . . . homeless by choice . . . homeless by your own fault. Oh, you may have a home decorated quite elaborately and properly for this festive season; but there will come a time when, because of your own choices, your own fault – what you have thought . . . what you have said . . . what you have done – that you will have no place to go, no place to call home; unless it be a 4 foot by 8 foot piece of real estate 6 feet under the ground.

To be sure, God has a home – an eternal heavenly home, a home of life and joy and peace, a home where there is no sorrow or tears or pain. The problem, however, is that only a certain kind of people can live in that home. Listen to how the psalmist puts it: “O Lord, who shall sojourn in Your house? Who shall dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbour, or takes up a reproach against his friend; but who honours the Lord.” But who among us has not done any of these things? Who among us always honours the Lord by walking blamelessly and does what is right? The psalmist proceeds to answer that in no uncertain terms: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

And try as we might, we continue to make bad choices – New Year's resolutions don't even help. And we do so because of who we are . . . because of where we come from . . . because of what others may have done to us. No, we aren't sinners because we sin; rather, we sin because that is precisely what we by nature are – sinners who choose to sin, homeless by choice. Listen to what the apostle Paul, the author of tonight's Epistle Reading, says – says not just about others, but even about himself: “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Wretched man that I am!”

Oh, we could all probably list a whole bunch of good deeds that we have done – done for others . . . done, yes, for a few homeless people now and then . . . done, perhaps, even for God. But God, however, who searches and knows the heart – your heart, my heart – could provide, at the same time, a naughty list that would put each and every one of us to shame. Do we deserve His righteous wrath and judgment, to be written off as beyond hope, to be passed by on the street? Yes . . . yes, indeed; for we are homeless by our own fault, by our most grievous fault, locked out of heaven, out of Paradise.

But now, on this holy night, we hear about a God who does not give us what we deserve; instead, we hear about a God who has pity . . . who has mercy . . . who has compassion on the homeless. We hear about a God who sees our outstretched beggar's hand; and takes it in His own hand to lead us to His home . . . to gather us together around His tree and to feast at His table. "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." Just think of what is going on here this Christmas Eve: Christ the Lord, the only-begotten Son of God, the eternal Son of the Father – who from all eternity lived in His Father's house – came into this world as one of us, becoming homeless Himself, so that we might have a home with Him forever.

It was, as such, no mere coincidence that there was no room for Him in the inn. It was no accident that He was homeless in Bethlehem. It was by His choice – by His own most gracious choice – that He chose to take on our very flesh and blood in the womb of the virgin Mary, be born in a stable of all places, and be laid in a manger. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head," Jesus would later say of Himself. Homeless in order that He might make a home for all the homeless people of this world, including you and me. Homeless as one of us, in our place, so that we might indeed "sojourn in His house and dwell on His holy hill" forever.

And like the homeless of this world, His wardrobe would thus consist only of the few clothes on His back – some swaddling clothes when He was born, and later some sandals, and a robe. But even these would be taken from Him when, while hanging on a cross, some Roman soldiers would cast lots for them . . . and that little Baby, born in a stable and laid in a manger "because there was no room for them in the inn," would suffer and die a homeless man's death, die as a sinner in our place, forsaken by His own heavenly Father so that we poor, wretched, homeless sinners might no longer be forsaken.

That is what the angel is really talking about when he says to the shepherds on this holy night: “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” That is what Jesus Himself is talking about when He will say to the disciples in the Upper Room on the night before He would die a homeless man’s death: “In My Father’s house are many rooms. I go there to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”

Did you hear that? To prepare a place for us in His Father’s house . . . His place . . . so that we might be homeless no longer, but children of God. Do you deserve a place in the Father’s house? Not hardly. But by God’s great love He gives it to us as a pure gift . . . out of pure grace, pure mercy, pure charity . . . even gathering us together here and now in His house around a tree – the tree of His cross . . . even inviting and welcoming us to the Christmas feast at His table – the feast of His very body and blood. Tonight’s Epistle Reading sums it up this way: “Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession.”

Yes, the homeless – that is who this holy night is all about . . . homeless you . . . homeless me . . . and God who became homeless in a stable as a newborn Baby because there was no room for Him in the inn, so that we might be homeless no longer . . . so that we might come home for the holidays. Amen.