

An Homily or Sermon Concerning the Nativity and Birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ

Matthew 1:18-25; Romans 5

Throughout this year, Simon and I have been reading through the anglican homilies. These were a series of sermons from the 16th century, given to ministers along with the prayer book, to enable them to teach well the truth of the gospel for the edification of their churches.

A few weeks ago we read *An homily or Sermon Concerning the Nativity and Birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ*. Some title I know! And we found it wonderfully encouraging. And so I thought it could be a cool thing for us to hear that sermon today for the edification of our church.

I have shortened it slightly, and modernised some of the language. But otherwise it is the same sermon that may even have been preached on this very Sunday some 400 years ago. I hope you will be encouraged by the same good news of Christmas and benefits of the gospel that have captivated our brothers and sisters all over the world and all throughout history.

[If you would like to read the full homily, complete with footnotes and Bible references, you can find a version here:

<https://northamanglican.com/an-homily-concerning-the-nativity/>

The Problem of Humanity

Among all the creatures that God made in the beginning of the world, most excellent and wonderful in their kind, there was none, as the Scripture says, to be compared almost in any point unto human beings; who, as well in body and in soul, exceeded all other, no less than the sun

in brightness and light exceeds every small and little star in the sky. He was made according to the image and likeness of God; he was imbued with all kind of heavenly gifts; he had no spot of uncleanness in him; he was sound and perfect in all parts, both outwardly and inwardly; his reason was uncorrupt; his understanding was pure and good; his will was obedient and godly; he was made altogether like God in righteousness, in holiness, in wisdom, in truth, to be short, in all kind of perfection.

When he was thus created and made, Almighty God, in token of his great love towards him, chose out a special place of the earth for him, namely, Paradise. There he lived in all tranquillity and pleasure, having great abundance of worldly goods, and lacking nothing that he might justly require or desire. Was not this a mirror of perfection? Was not this a full, perfect, and blessed estate? Could any greater felicity be desired in this world?

But, just as it is the common nature for all men in times of prosperity and wealth, to forget not only themselves but also God, even so did this first man Adam. He had but one commandment at God's hand, namely, that he should not eat of the fruit of knowledge of good and ill. And yet most unmindfully, or rather most wilfully, he broke it, forgetting the simple charge of his Maker, and giving ear to the crafty suggestion of that wicked serpent the devil. And so it came to pass, that, as before he was blessed, so now he was accursed; as before he was loved, so now he was abhorred; as before he was most beautiful and precious, so now he was most vile and wretched, in the sight of his Lord and Maker. Instead

of the image of God, he was become now the the image of the devil; instead of the citizen of heaven, he was become the bonds slave of hell; having in himself no one part of his former purity and cleanness but being altogether spotted and denied; now he seemed to be nothing else but a lump of sin, and therefore by the just judgment of God was condemned to everlasting death.

This so great and miserable a plague, if it had only rested on Adam, who first offended, that might be borne easily enough. But it fell not only on him, but also on his posterity and children for ever; so that the whole brood of Adam's flesh should sustain the very same fall and punishment which their forefather by his offence most justly had deserved. As we just read, St. Paul in the fifth chapter to the Romans says *By the offence of only Adam the fault came upon all men to condemnation, and by one man's disobedience many were made sinners*. By these words we are taught, that, as in Adam all men universally sinned, so in Adam all men universally received the reward of sin.

That is to say, all humanity became mortal and subject unto death, having in themselves nothing but everlasting damnation both of body and soul. *They became, as David says, corrupt and abominable; they went all out of the way; there was none that did good, no not one*. O what a miserable and woeful state was this, that the sin of one man should destroy and condemn all people, that nothing in all the world might be looked for but only pangs of death and pains of hell! Had it been any marvel if mankind had been utterly driven to desperation, being thus fallen from life to death, from salvation to destruction, from heaven to hell?

The Promise of God

But behold the great goodness and tender mercy of God on this behalf. Man's wickedness and sinful behaviour was such that it deserved not in any part to be forgiven. Yet, God ordained a new covenant so that we might not be robbed of all hope and comfort in time to come. God made a sure promise: namely, that he would send a Messiah or Mediator into the world, who should make intercession, and put himself between both parties, to pacify the wrath and indignation conceived against sin, and to deliver man out of the miserable curse and cursed misery into which he was fallen head long by disobeying the will and commandment of his only Lord and Maker.

This covenant and promise was first made to Adam himself immediately after his fall, as we read in the third chapter of Genesis. God said to the serpent: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed: he shall break your head, and you shall bruise his heel.* Afterward that very same covenant was more amply and plainly renewed to Abraham. God promised him, *that in his seed all nations and families of the earth should be blessed.* And, so that mankind might not despair, but always live in hope, Almighty God never ceased to publish, repeat, confirm, and continue his promise by the many testimonies of the Prophets.

They prophesied the time, the place, the manner, and circumstance of his birth, the afflictions of his life, the kind of his death, the glory of his resurrection, the receiving of his kingdom, and the deliverance of his people. Isaiah prophesied that he should be born of a virgin, and called Emmanuel. Micah prophesied that he should be born in Bethlehem.

Ezekiel prophesied that he should come of the stock and lineage of David. Malachi prophesied that he should send Elijah before him, which was John the Baptist. And all this was done, that the promise and covenant of God, made unto Abraham and his children concerning the redemption of the world, might be credited and fully believed.

Now, as the Apostle Paul says, *when the fulness of time was come*, then God, according to his former covenant and promise, sent a Messiah, otherwise called a Mediator, into the world. This Messiah was not one like Moses, nor like Joshua, Saul, or David, but one who would deliver mankind from the bitter curse of the law, and make perfect satisfaction by his death for the sins of all people. Namely, he sent his dear and only Son Jesus Christ, made, as the Apostle says, of a woman, and made under the law, that he might redeem them that were in bondage of the law, and make them the children of God by adoption. Was not this a wonderful great love towards us that were his professed and open enemies? Towards us that were by nature the children of wrath and firebrands of hell fire?

St. Paul says: Christ, *when we were yet of no strength, die for us being ungodly. Doubtless a man will scarce die for a righteous man. Perhaps someone might die for him of whom he has received good. But God sets out his love towards us, in that he sent Christ to die for us, when we were yet void of all goodness.* Here the Apostle amplifies and sets forth the tender mercy and great goodness of God, declared towards mankind, in sending down *a saviour* from heaven, even *Christ the Lord*. This one benefit is so exceedingly great and wonderful, that neither tongue can well express it, neither heart think it, much less give sufficient thanks to God for it.

Christmas Controversies

But this Christmas message is not without controversy! For some think it an absurd thing, and contrary to all reason, that a Redeemer and Saviour of the whole world should come into the world as he did! Scorned, reviled, scourged, condemned, and last of all cruelly hanged. This, I say, seemed in their eyes strange and most absurd; and therefore they refuse to acknowledge Christ to be their Messiah and Saviour. But we, dearly beloved, that hope and look to be saved, must both steadfastly believe and also boldly confess, that the same Jesus which was born of the Virgin Mary was the true Messiah and Mediator between God and man, promised and prophesied of so long before. There is no doubt but in this point all Christian people are fully and perfectly persuaded.

And the Scriptures furnish us with all manner of proofs in this matter: First, you have the witness and testimony of the angel Gabriel, declared as well to Zachariah the high priest as also to the blessed Virgin. Secondly, you have the witness and testimony of John the Baptist, pointing unto Christ, and saying, *Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world.* Thirdly, you have the witness and testimony of God the Father, who thundered from heaven, and said, *This is my dearly beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear him.* To these might be added the witness and testimony of the wise men that came to Herod, the witness and testimony of Simeon and Anna, the witness and testimony of Andrew and Philip, Nathanael and Peter, Nicodemus, and Martha, and many others: but I best not go on and on, especially among those who are already persuaded!

Therefore, if anyone shall attempt or go about to withdraw you from this true Messiah, and persuade you to look for some other Saviour that is not yet come, let them not in any case seduce you. Instead confirm yourselves with these and such other testimonies of holy Scripture, which are so sure and certain, that all the devils in hell shall never be able to withstand them. For, as truly as God lives, so truly was Jesus Christ the true Messiah and Saviour of the world, even the same Jesus who was born of the Virgin Mary, without all help of man, only by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit.

Similarly, because divers and sundry heresies are risen in these our days through the motion and suggestion of Satan, therefore it shall be profitable for your instruction to speak a word or two also concerning Christ's nature and substance. We are evidently taught in the Scripture, that our Lord and Saviour Christ consists of two natures; of his manhood, he is perfect man; and of his Godhood he is perfect God.

It is written: The Word, that is, the second person of the Trinity, became flesh. God sending his own Son in the similitude of sinful flesh fulfilled those things which the law could not. Christ being in the form of God took on him the form of a servant and was made like unto man, being found in shape as a man. God was shewed in the flesh, justified in spirit, seen of angels, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up in glory.

These are plain places for the proof and declaration of both natures united and knit together in one Christ. Let us also diligently consider and weigh the works that he did while he lived on earth, and we shall perceive the very same thing to be most true. In that he did hunger and thirst, eat and drink, sleep and wake; in that, he preached his Gospel to

the people; in that he wept and sorrowed for Jerusalem; in that he died and suffered death; what else does he declare to us but that he was perfect man as we are? For which cause he is called in holy Scripture *the son of David, the Son of Man, the son of Mary, the son of Joseph* and so forth.

Now in that he forgave sins: in that he wrought miracles; in that he cast out devils; in that he healed men with only his word; in that he knew the thoughts of men's hearts ; in that he commanded the seas; in that he walked on the water; in that he rose from death to life; in that he ascended into heaven, and so forth; what else does that show us but that he was perfect God, coequal with his Father? Therefore he saith *The Father and I are all one*: which is to be understood of his Godhead; for as touching his humanity he saith *The Father is greater than I am*.

Where now are those that deny Christ to have been born in flesh, or to have been perfect man? Where now are those who deny Christ to have been perfect God, of equal substance with the Father? For the necessity of our salvation did require such a Mediator and Saviour. It was necessary he should be man: it was also necessary he should be God. For, as the transgression came by man, so was it proper the satisfaction should be made by man. And, because death is the just *stipend and reward of sin* it was expedient that our Mediator should take upon himself the sins of mankind, and sustain the due punishment of our sin in death. Moreover, he came in flesh, and in the very same flesh ascended into heaven, to declare to us, that all who steadfastly believe in him shall likewise come unto the same heavenly home where he, our chief captain, has gone before. Last of all, he became man, that we might receive the greater comfort in our prayers and also in our adversity; For we have a Mediator that is true man as we are, *who also is touched with our*

infirmities and was tempted even in the like sort as we are. For these and many other reasons it was most necessary he should come, as he did, in the flesh.

But, because no mere creature has power to destroy death and give life, to overcome hell and purchase heaven, to remit sins and give righteousness, therefore it was necessary that our Messiah should be not only full and perfect man, but also full and perfect God. Only then could he make full and perfect satisfaction for mankind. God says, *This is my wellbeloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* Here we learn that Christ appeased and quenched the wrath of his Father, not only as the Son of man, but much more in that he was the Son of God.

Thus ye have heard declared out of the Scriptures, that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah and Saviour of the world, that he was by nature and substance perfect God and perfect man.

Christmas Benefits

Now, that we may be the more mindful and thankful unto God for all of this, let us briefly consider and call to mind the manifold and great benefits that we have received by the nativity and birth of this our Messiah and Saviour. Before Christ's coming into the world, all men universally were nothing else but a wicked and crooked generation rotten and corrupt trees, stony ground full of brambles and briers, lost sheep, prodigal sons, naughty and unprofitable servants, unrighteous stewards, workers of iniquity, the brood of adders, blind guides, sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. To be short, nothing else but children of perdition and inheritors of hell fire. But after he was once come down from heaven, and had taken our frail nature upon him, he made all that would receive him truly and believe his word, good trees and good ground, fruitful and pleasant branches, children of light, citizens of heaven, sheep of his fold, members of his body, heirs of his kingdom, his true friends and brethren, sweet and lively bread, the elect and chosen people of God.

For, as St. Peter says in the second chapter of his First Epistle, he bare our sins in his body upon the cross; healed us and made us whole by his stripes; and, whereas before we were sheep going astray, he by his coming brought us home again to the true Shepherd and Overseer of our souls; making us a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a chosen people of God. For he died for our offences, and rose again for our justification. In this and such other places is set out before our eyes, as it were in a glass, the abundant grace of God received in Christ Jesus. And how much more wonderful this is, because it came not for any merit of

our own, but of his mere and tender mercy, even then when we were his extreme enemies.

But, for the better understanding and consideration of this thing, let us behold the end of his coming: so shall we perceive what great profit his nativity hath brought unto us miserable and sinful creatures. The end of his coming was *to save and deliver his people, to fulfil the law for us, to bear witness to the truth, to teach and preach the words of his Father, to give light unto the world, to call sinners to repentance, to refresh them that labour and be heavy laden, to cast out the prince of this world, to reconcile us in the body of his flesh, to dissolve the works of the devil last of all, to become a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world.* These were the chief ends for which Christ became man, not for any profit that should come to himself, but only for our sakes; that we might understand the will of God, be partakers of his heavenly light, be delivered out of the devil's claws, released from the burden of sin, justified through faith in his blood, and finally received up into everlasting glory, there to reign with him for ever. Was not this a great and singular love of Christ towards mankind, that *being the express and lively image of God* he would nevertheless *humble himself and take upon him the form of a servant* and only so he could save and redeem us? O how much are we bound to the goodness of God! How many thanks and praises do we owe him for this our salvation, wrought by his dear and only Son Christ: who became a pilgrim in earth, to make us citizens in heaven; who became the Son of man, to make us the sons of God; who became obedient to the law, to *deliver us from the curse of the law*; who *became poor to make us rich*; vile to make us precious; subject to death to make us live for ever. What greater love could we frail creatures desire or wish to receive from God's hands?

Therefore, dearly beloved, let us not forget this exceeding love of our Lord and Saviour; let us not shew ourselves unmindful or unthankful towards him: but let us love him, fear him, obey him, and serve him. Let us confess him with our mouths, praise him with our tongues, believe on him with our hearts, and glorify him with our good works.

Christ is *the light* let us receive the light. Christ is the truth, let us believe the truth. Christ the the way; let us follow the way. And because his is our only Master, our only Teacher, our only Shepherd, and Chief Captain, therefore let us become his servants, his scholars, his sheep, and his soldiers. As for sin, the flesh, the world, and the devil, whose servants and bondslaves we were before Christ's coming, let us utterly cast them off, and defy them, as the chief and only enemies of our soul.

Happy are they says Scripture *that continue to the end. Be faithful* says God, *until death and I will give thee a crown of life.* Therefore let us be strong, *steadfast and immovable, abounding always in the works of the Lord.* Let us receive Christ, not for a time, but for ever; let us believe his word, not for a time, but for ever; let us become his servants, not for a time, but for ever; in consideration that he has redeemed and saved us, not for a time, but for ever ; and he will receive us into his heavenly kingdom, there to reign with him, not for a time, but for ever.

To him therefore with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all honour, praise, and glory for ever and ever. Amen.