



ABOUT THE PROPER

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Nativity of Our Lord

Christmas Day

December 25, 2024



The Word Became Flesh

With the glory of the Lord still shining from the Luke 2 reading last night, we assemble once again to celebrate with joy “the Word” (in Greek: ὁ λόγος / ho logos) made flesh. The Nativity of Our Lord on Christmas Day is the festival of Jesus’ Incarnation: the truth that the eternal Son of God was born in time as the son of Mary so that in his flesh he might free us from the bondage of sin. From the beginning, the solution to sin was the flesh and blood of God. Therefore today we rejoice in Jesus’ Nativity. God in man has come to us to live, die, and rise again to set us free. Glory to God in the highest!

First Reading³ Exodus 33:18-23; 34:5-7

To reveal himself to us, God hid himself in human flesh. To reveal himself to Moses, God hid Moses within the cleft of a mountain. The “sermon for the name of the LORD” is heard on Mt. Sinai and seen in the fulfillment of his name. Moses saw it on the Mount of Transfiguration. John saw it. And now we, through eyes of faith, see it, too – the glory of the LORD in the fullness of the Incarnation.

Second Reading³ Romans 8:31-32

This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. Since God is for us, and since he did not spare his own Son to free us from the condemnation of sin, none of the troubles we have in this life can separate us from God’s love.

Gospel¹ John 1:1-18

John’s Christmas story begins in eternity within the Godhead. That the Son is eternally God and that he shared in the creation of the universe only underscores the enormity of his condescension to become man. In a paucity of words Scripture describes the indescribable: “And the Word flesh became and tented among us.” How shocking that this had to be true! God had to become flesh and blood to be born under law, to suffer, and to die that he might redeem us. John’s expression, “He tented among us,” recalls the tabernacle of the Exodus that moved with the people of God in the desert. God was there beneath the skins. So with Christ, God’s glory could be seen as he came in grace and truth, in flesh and blood, to give us the right to be children of God.

Psalm of the Day⁴ Psalm 98 G “Sing to the LORD a New Song”

The Church sings Psalm 98 in services that praise God for bringing righteousness and salvation to people across the world. It is traditionally sung on Christmas Day. Martin Luther said, “Like Psalm 97, Psalm 98 is a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ extending into all the world. It calls on everyone to be joyful and to praise God for his salvation. We do that by preaching and giving thanks for the redemption given to us through Christ. He has redeemed us from sin and death by himself alone, without our merit.”

Gospel Acclamation Galatians 4:4,5

“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law.” At the precise moment of God’s choosing, he fulfilled his long-prophesied promise to send his Son, the Savior, into the world. He humbled himself to be born as a human, and therefore accountable to God’s law, so that he might save lawbreakers from their sins with his sacrifice of blood.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, grant that the birth of your only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old bondage under the yoke of sin; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

358 “Of the Father’s Love Begotten” (Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, 348- c. 413)

The Nicene Creed was written as a statement of faith that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are all of the same nature, three and yet one. This Trinitarian hymn, with very ancient roots, is a confession of faith about the Christ, the eternal Son of God, whose birth and saving ministry were the fulfillment of ancient prophecies (vv. 1-3). The final stanzas are a doxology inspired by John’s visions recorded in Revelation 4-7 (vv. 4-5).

Church Year Season¹

Christmas

The Christmas season celebrates the Incarnation of the Son of God. The eternal Word became flesh that he might be the Christ, anointed to redeem God’s people. God had to become man to live under the law and die in our place. Christ’s birth, then, is inextricably connected to his death: Good Friday necessitated Christmas. So great is the love of God that even though our sin required such a sacrifice, the Light of the world still descended into our darkness.

Colors & Symbolism

Christmas: White

White is the color of our Triune God and heaven. It also symbolizes joy, celebration, gladness, light, purity and innocence. We receive these blessings through faith because Christ, our righteousness Savior, has forgiven all our sins.

Traditions & Customs

Christmas

In addition to lighting the Christ candle at the center of the Advent wreath, decorating the church and house (including the Christmas tree), setting up the Nativity scene, engaging in charitable acts, and giving and exchanging presents. many families follow the tradition of gathering around on Christmas Eve or Day and reading the nativity story from Luke 2. Although many consider Christmas Day as the end of the Christmas season, this is not the case. Traditionally, celebrations and festivities began on Christmas Day (or Christmas Eve night) and continued throughout the Christmas season. The Christmas carol, *The Twelve Days of Christmas* points to this. It was the practice to give/receive a gift on each of the twelve days; although some only celebrated during the ‘Christmas Octave,’ which was the eight days from Christmas Day through New Year’s Day.

Nain Paraments

Christmas

Superfrontal: “Immanuel” is Hebrew for “God with us.” This name for Jesus Christ was revealed to God’s people through Isaiah in a prophecy of the Savior’s birth (7:14). The angel Gabriel announced to Joseph in a dream that the child in the Virgin Mary’s womb would be that promised Immanuel – God who had come to be with us (Matthew 1:23) in order to save us. Sometimes the name is spelled *Emmanuel*, which is the Latin alphabet transliteration of the Hebrew pronunciation of the same name.

The vines next to Immanuel represent the spiritual life that Jesus, the vine brings to God’s children, the branches (John 15:5).

Lectern antependium: *The Greek Cross:* distinguished by four arms of equal length.

Pulpit antependium: *The Celtic Cross:* similar to the Latin cross (†), but with a circle surrounding the center, which symbolizes the eternal nature of Christ and the gift of eternal life to all who believe in him.

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year B”. Daniel M. Deutschlander, Author.

³ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author.

⁴ From *Christian Worship: Psalter* © 2021 Northwestern Publishing House. Reprinted by permission.

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