

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD (Christmas Day)

Hymns: 95, 647, 74, 85

The INTROIT

(Is.9:6;Ps.98:1a)

P: Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given:

C: and the government shall be upon His shoulder.

P: And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God:

C: the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

P: Oh, sing unto the Lord a new song:

C: for He hath done marvelous things.

The COLLECT

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the new birth of Thine only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free, who are held in the old bondage under the yoke of sin; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy son, our Lord, who liveth, and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Micah 5:2-4

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

The GRADUAL (1)

(Ps.118:23,26,27; 93:1)

P:/C: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: God is the Lord which hath showed us light.

P:/C: This is the Lord's doing: it is marvelous in our eyes. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

P:/C: The Lord reigneth, He is clothed with majesty: The lord is clothed with strength, wherewith He hath girded Himself. Hallelujah!

The GRADUAL (from TLH "Christmas Day" - 2nd option)

(Ps.98:2-4; 95:1,6)

P:/C: All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God; make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth.

P:/C: The Lord hath made known His salvation; His righteousness hath He openly showed in the sight of the heathen. Alleluia! Alleluia!

P:/C: Oh, come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us worship and bow down before Him. Alleluia!

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 2:15-20

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

H672

אפרת / אפרתה

'ephrath / 'ephra^{tha}'h**BDB Definition:**

Ephrath or Ephratah = “ash-heap: place of fruitfulness”

- 1) a place near Bethel where Rachel died and was buried (noun proper locative)
- 2) another name for Bethlehem (noun proper locative)
- 3) wife of Caleb (noun proper feminine)

Part of Speech: see above in Definition**A Related Word by BDB/Strong's Number:** from [H6509](#)

H665

אפר

'e^{pher}**BDB Definition:**

- 1) ashes
- 2) (CLBL) worthlessness (figuratively)

Part of Speech: noun masculine**A Related Word by BDB/Strong's Number:** from an unused root meaning to bestrew**Same Word by TWOT Number:** 150a

Num 19:9-10

9 And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.

10 And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever.

(KJV)

Num 19:17

17 And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel:

(KJV)

Micah 5:2-4 — “In the Majesty of the Name of the LORD His God”

INTRODUCTION

I. BETHLEHEM EPHRATAH

II. THEREFORE WILL HE GIVE THEM UP, UNTIL THE TIME

III. IN THE MAJESTY OF THE NAME OF THE LORD HIS GOD

CONCLUSION

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD (Christmas Day)

Hymns: 95, 647, 74, 85

Micah 5:2-4 — “In the Majesty of the Name of the LORD His God”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today is the celebration of the Christ Mass, and the appointed reading of the Old Testament is Micah 5:2-4:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Today is the Festival of the Holy Communion of the Saints, that is, today is the Festival of the gathering of those who have been washed and regenerated and renewed as God’s holy people. This is the point that St. Paul makes in today’s reading of the Epistle, and which is the continuation and fulfillment of the prophecy of Micah fulfilled in the Holy Gospel. St. Paul’s Epistle to Titus provides the link and the explanation of the promise of the birth of the Christ, the source of our feasting this day. Hear again the words recorded by the beloved apostle to the Gentiles:

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This is what Christmas is all about. This is what was prophesied of old and what is recorded as being fulfilled in the Holy Gospels. It is indeed fitting on this celebration of the Festival of the Christ Mass that we reflect upon this great promise prophesied throughout the Old Testament and especially in our reading from Micah.

I. BETHLEHEM EPHRATAH

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

This one marvelous sentence has enough packed into it that we may spend our entire lives digesting it. Yet the Holy Spirit speaks volumes more in the two sentences that follow. But we shall begin with this sentence. **“But thou, . . .”** This is singular. Even though a city is made up of many people, it is nevertheless one city. When a city is addressed, all of its inhabitants are included at once, as a single entity. What is more is that when the city is addressed, all future generations are impacted by what is said. What is said and done regarding a city is said and done to all who will ever be associated with that city. Therefore, we hear spoken to us as well, in our association and connection to this city, what is spoken in our text. **“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah,”** is spoken to all who would live in this city and to all who will benefit from what is said and done regarding this city.

Two names are used. Both are in the Hebrew language and both names carry rich meaning. The first name used is the newer name of Bethlehem, which means, *house of bread*. It is a name that promises fruitfulness and prosperity. It is a name that promises that those who come to it shall be fed.

The second name is more complex, Ephratah. It is commonly translated as fruitfulness, based upon the root, *parah*. However, this word can also properly be translated from the root, *epher*, which means *ashes*. This would have special significance to the people of God, the people of the promise of the Seed of the Woman by whom redemption and salvation would be accomplished by the LORD, even as was promised to Adam and Eve and continuously throughout history. But Ephratah, the fruitful place of ashes is where the wife of Jacob, or Israel, gave birth to her second son, Benjamin, and died. In this place both life and death occurred. In this place Israel buried his beloved bride: *ashes to ashes, dust to dust*. This was proclaimed to Adam in Genesis 3 using this same word for dust or ashes. From the place of ashes, the woman, came forth life and fruitfulness. Micah foretells that the promised ruler of Israel shall come forth from this fruitful place of ashes, Ephratah, also known as the house of bread, Bethlehem.

But the ashes have even deeper significance. For this word for ashes is also used in Numbers 19. Here the LORD provides a baptism of purification from the uncleanness of death for the Old Testament people. A red heifer is taken outside the congregation and sacrificed. After it is slaughtered it is burned with cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet. These ashes were to be kept for use for anyone who was touched by the uncleanness of death. The ashes were to be kept in a clean place outside the congregation to be used for a “water of separation.” Moses says: **“And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.”**

Sin is the cause of death. By means of this special baptism, the people of the Old Testament were purified and separated unto the LORD as His holy people until the time that the Christ should come. This is the significance of the birth of Jesus, the Savior, in Bethlehem Ephratah. This is the baptism that He was born to fulfill. John baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus came to John to be baptized into His ministry by which Jesus would apply His Ashes and His Blood to the Water and make it an everlasting water of separation and purification for sin. It is this everlasting Water of Life that we receive and by which God separates us into His Holy Communion as the Church of the New Testament in Christ’s blood. Jesus is the Ruler “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” This is why He is able to accomplish this. He is the only-begotten Son of the Father from eternity. He is the bread that is come down from heaven, born in the fertile ashes of the house of bread.

II. THEREFORE WILL HE GIVE THEM UP, UNTIL THE TIME

Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.

This is a rich and wonderful promise that is built upon a hard word that is difficult for us to hear. We love to celebrate the birth of the babe in the manger. We love to imagine ourselves as the Faithful who come to Bethlehem singing, “O come let us adore Him.” But we are not so eager to hear the words, **“Therefore will he give them up, until the time . . .”**

Yes, by the LORD’s decree, there are many times where the people are given up to suffering and trials of every kind imaginable in this world. This, however, does not originate in the will of God for us. He does not desire that we should stand helpless and feeling abandoned. No. This is by our choice. We are the ones who turn from the means of grace by which the LORD promises to come to us and to be with us. We are the ones who mingle other thoughts and ideas with the pure Word of God so that we become confused and begin to depend upon our own prayers and our devotion and our commitment and our repentance and our self-examination and our attempts at being loving and kind and our attempts at improving ourselves. The more that we look to these attempts of our own, the less and less we depend upon the means of grace that the LORD has ordained for His Church, the farther and farther away we wander from His Holy Communion. Thus the LORD gives us up to our own choices and decisions so that we experience the heartache and forsaken ways that we have chosen for ourselves. For the LORD is not in these ways and until we experience this for ourselves we will not hear the call by which repentance is worked in our hearts.

The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*. *Metanoia* means, *after-mind* or *changed-mind*. Repentance is the change of heart, mind, and will that the Holy Spirit works in us through the gift of faith. Repentance and conversion are essentially the same. God converts our heart, mind, and soul so that we see ourselves as being reunited with Him in Christ through the water of separation and purification for sin. Having been separated and purified, we then walk in the newness of life guaranteed by Christ’s resurrection.

Yet in our lives, we experience many reminders of “being given up until the time.” Every time that in our hearts we turn back to the way of sin, the LORD gives us up to our own desires so that we are broken in spirit and are prepared again to hear His Word of sanctification. Amazingly, the LORD continues to keep in mind the time when **“she which travaileth hath brought forth.”** While we may lose sight of this time, He remembers that by His grace He shall bring us back again.

Yes, this is the point of celebrating the Christ Mass in connection with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem Ephratah. His birth issues in the ministry of reconciliation by which **“then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.”** As we rightly discern the body of the LORD, like the shepherds who heard the glad tidings that the angels heralded, we also will run to the place where the Scriptures promise that the Savior is borne to us in flesh and blood. We come to the fruitful ashes of the house of bread and draw near unto the place where the body and blood of Jesus are made available to us. This is the true meaning of Christmas. This is what was promised of old.

III. IN THE MAJESTY OF THE NAME OF THE LORD HIS GOD

And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

Yes, indeed, through His called and ordained servant of the Word, through the one who has been called and ordained to stand in the strength of the LORD, the God-Man born of the virgin has become great unto the ends of the earth in every place where people gather unto the pure means of grace. This is the promise that is made from of old. This is the promise that is made new for us today. This is the promise which Jesus was born to fulfill. This is the promise that Jesus called the apostles to carry into all the world. This is the promise into which all nations are to be baptized. This is the promise that makes disciples of all nations and keeps them in Christ Jesus in the one true faith. Today Jesus comes to us to feed us His own flesh and blood with the bread and the wine. First He feeds us through the spoken Word of the liturgy and the preaching. Then He prepares us to come worthily unto His Table. Then He feeds us the very forgiveness and life that He purchased for us with His holy precious blood and by His innocent suffering and death.

This is what is promised in the body of the little man born of Mary. This one, who is truly God from eternity, is also truly Man, born in time in the flesh. This one, who from eternity stands as the Ruler of all, humbled Himself to be born of the virgin, so that while being very God of very God, He nevertheless calls the LORD His God. Such a marvelous mystery even mystifies the holy angels! It is hard to say it any better than in the blessed and ancient Creed of the holy catholic Church:

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe faithfully the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man;

God of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world;

Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.

Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood;

Who, although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but one Christ: One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking the manhood into God;

One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ;

Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead;

He ascended into heaven; He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give an account of their own works.

And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.

This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.

This is what Micah has written for us in proclaiming the promise which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the blessings and gifts provided in connection with whose birth we celebrate and partake of today in the Christ Mass.

CONCLUSION

Truly this is a day of great blessing and cause for continual thanksgiving and rejoicing. Truly God has kept His promises and has come to us in the body of Jesus, born of Mary, and into which we have been baptized. As members of our Lord's body we come to His Table and eat and drink forgiveness and life. This is the purity that the LORD has provided even from eternity. This is the blessed separation to which we have been called, in which we rejoice and give thanks continually. God keep us in His grace this day and every day until the Lord Jesus returns. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.