Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-1-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week begins with an Old Testament reading that expresses a wonderful benediction on God's people. The second reading is most appropriate for this season of the year. Paul writes to the church in Galatia and encourages them with the marvelous truth that God sent His Son, Jesus, to be the promised Messiah, and He did so at just the right time. The Gospel reading reveals one of the prominent features of the Christmas story, the shepherds, who were the first to hear of the newborn child. [This week was written by Jesse Deloe.]

Introduction to the First Reading:

The Book of Numbers takes up the story where Exodus left it; Leviticus was parenthetical with lots of teaching about the law that had first been noted in Exodus. Numbers is a book of order, preparing the people for the wilderness wanderings. Its theme is service, how God's people should worship and walk in a life of purity.

First Reading:

Numbers 6:22-27 NAS95 22 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: 24 The LORD bless you, and keep you; 25 The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; 26 The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.' 27 "So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them."

There are three triplets in vv. 24-26. Could that be a hint of the Trinity? In any case, there are five blessings that the priest is to share with the people. "The LORD bless you" is the first. The term means merely that God will show favor to His people. That would have been a great encouragement to this multitude of people wandering in the wilderness. "… and keep you." God promises to guard, protect, and preserve His people. "The LORD make His face shine on you." This was the request of the psalmist many years later, "Let the light of your face shine on us" (Psalm 4:6). You will recall that after Moses met with the Lord on Mt. Sinai, his face shone with the reflected glory of God (Exodus 34:30). And Paul tells us that "the knowledge of God's glory [is] displayed in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

"And be gracious to you." God is the God of grace; He continually gives to His people what they don't deserve (that's grace). "The LORD lift up His countenance on you" is another way of saying "make His face shine on you." It's a comfort to know that God is always looking at His people and seeking to provide for them. "And give you peace." The Old Testament word for peace is still heard today in many parts of the Middle East. It's "shalom," and it means far more than the absence of hatred and war. It suggests health and wholeness, harmony. And, of course, it is only God who can give that kind of peace ultimately.

To make this text relevant to believers today, remember that if you are in Christ, God extends these same blessings to you: favor or grace, protection and provision, shining His face on you, and giving you spiritual health and wholeness.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul's letter to the Galatians is an argument against falling away from faith. It's a challenge to recognize our position in Christ and conduct our lives as people of faith. The portion we're reading today has some really deep theological content that is important for the believer to understand.

Second Reading:

Galatians 4:4-7 NAS95 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

The first verse of our study takes us to the Christmas theme, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman." It's the fulfillment of centuries of promises of the Old Testament prophets. And it occurred at exactly the right time; Paul describes it as "the fullness of the time." The known world at the time of Christ's coming was largely centralized with the Roman Empire in control. There was a trade language that was known worldwide, so the message of the Gospel could be circulated and understood within a few years of Christ's life. Many of the religions of the day were expecting some

kind of "savior." During the 400 silent years between the Old and New Testament God was preparing men, nations, and civilizations—unwittingly to them—for Messiah's arrival.

In fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, Jesus was born. And Paul gives the reason for His coming: "that He might redeem those who were under the law." He came to be the sufficient sacrifice that God demanded as the penalty for our sin. But, there's more than that. Paul speaks of "the adoption as sons." In the culture of that day, a lad had no legal rights or standing until he reached a certain age. He was a real son of his father, but he was not entitled to an inheritance or standing as an adult son until he reached that age, and then he was "adopted" legally as the heir of his father. God, in His grace, has given to the believer today the Holy Spirit ("Spirit of His Son"), and we can call God "Father" or "Papa." As the young men in Galatia, once they were adopted, they were no longer like slaves, they were legitimate sons, heirs. So are believers today; no longer slaves to sin and the law, but free, adopted sons of the Father. And it's all of God's doing out of His amazing love and grace.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Among the many "Christmas" passages in the Bible, Luke 2 is probably the most often read. As told there, the story is filled with the miracles associated with the coming of Messiah, with a report of the first to be told, the shepherd. On the other hand, Matthew 2 tells of the wise men from the East who were led by a star to find the promised Jesus. We would do well, however, to read Philippians 2, also, which in a way tells the Christmas story from Jesus' point of view (vv. 5-8) and what it cost Him. Today's reading begins after the birth of Jesus and the shepherds hearing the announcement from the angels.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:16-21 NAS95 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them. 21 And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision,

His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

In our passage today we read that the shepherds, after hearing the announcement from the angels, "came in a hurry" to check out the story. Isn't it interesting that the announcement was made to men who were considered to be pretty low on society's register? But, it was to them that the announcement was made. We don't know all that they had been told, but they obviously believed the angels' message. They came and saw, and then they left to spread the good news, all the while "glorifying and praising God." As a result, many heard the story and wondered about it.

We're told that Mary also pondered about what had happened. The birth had been foretold, so she knew that this little baby was to be the "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). There is a popular Christmas song that asks, "Mary, did you know?" Well, she knew a lot. The angel had told her that this baby would be "great" and would have "the throne of David" and "reign over the house of Jacob forever in a "kingdom [that] will never end." (Luke 1:32-33). Even his name was given Mary and later to Joseph: Jesus "because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). So, Mary knew a lot about God's purposes for this baby, but she couldn't understand it all. Thus, she wondered about what it all meant and how it would work out.

According to the custom and the practice laid down by God for His people, Mary and Joseph presented the child to God; He was circumcised on the 8th day, and He was given the name Jesus, which means, "God saves." Thus began Jesus' human life on earth, one that He would eventually offer as the only sacrifice that can take away the sins of the world forever.

Happy New Years from Christians for Christ. May this New Year bring you closer to God in many ways.

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus, as the Son of God was truly God in the flesh whereas we as children of God are adopted into His family. In what ways have you yourself understood what it means to be an "adopted" son or daughter of God?

2. As adopted children of God not under the Law but under grace, in what ways to you rejoice in being free from the law and enjoying this father-son type of relationship with God?

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12-18-2016



This week as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ like last week we will be studying some important prophetic voices from the Old Testament. We will also be reading from the Gospel of Saint Matthew to hear how he confirmed that the coming birth of Jesus would fulfil these predictions made centuries earlier.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Before we turn to the first reading from Chapter 7 in Isaiah it's important for us to explain the personality of King Ahaz, the King of the Southern Tribe of Judah, about whom Isaiah will be speaking. Ahaz was son of King Jotham, the latter whom was a godly ruler of Judah. King Ahaz came into power when he was 20 years of age and he went bad immediately at the beginning of his reign. Second Chronicles provides an important insight into the personality of the King. "But he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; he also made molten images for the Baals" (2 Chronicles 28:2). Not only was Ahaz an idolater who caused the circulation of idols to the god Baal, but he even burned his own children as sacrifices to false gods. The Scripture said, "But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had driven out from before the sons of Israel" (2 Kings 16:3). He went from bad to worse after the attack of the King of Assyria who had already overtaken the Northern Tribes.

20 So Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. 21 Although Ahaz took a portion out of the house of the LORD and out of the palace of the king and of the princes, and gave it to the king of Assyria, it did not help him. 22 Now in the time of his

distress this same King Ahaz became yet more unfaithful to the LORD. 23 For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, "Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they became the downfall of him and all Israel. (2 Chronicles 28:20-23)

As if that wasn't bad enough, Ahaz then went on to block the entrance to the temple in order to prevent the true worship of God (2 Chronicles 28:25). King Ahaz started out bad and continued in his ungodly rule until the very end of his life without ever having a change of heart and repenting of his sin. It's with this understanding of the king that we turn to the text of the first reading from Isaiah.

First Reading:

10 Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 11 "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" 13 Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? 14 "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:10-14

The Lord gave King Ahaz the opportunity to trust in Him by asking for a sign. Instead of asking for a sign, King Ahaz spoke out of the pride and self-reliance of his heart, which displeased the Lord. God had given him an invitation and he refused to accept it. This "tried" the patience of the Lord because he persisted in his independence and refused to trust in God's provision of a sign to assure him. God used this event of obstinate disobedience to foretell of Messiah. This prophecy was ultimately fulfilled through the birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Because the Gospel reading relates to the prophecy of Isaiah from the first reading we will consider that passage next. This reading is from the first chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew.

Gospel Reading:

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." 22 Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 23 "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." 24 And Joseph arose from his sleep, and

did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife, 25 and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25)

While many of us are already familiar with the narrative concerning the birth of Jesus, this passage highlights important truths for our lives. First, Saint Matthew brought out the fact that Jesus was born not through natural human relations but through the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. This is important because since God is without sin this was the only means by which the sinless God-Man could come into the world. Second, since the virgin birth was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy we can trust other prophecies that speak to areas of our life and ministry. This includes things like how the second coming of the Lord will play out, how the world will be eventually unified under Jesus' earthly reign. Third, Jesus was sent to save His people from their sins. This is God's special invitation to counteract the destructive nature of sin in order to stand before a Holy God and not be rejected at the judgment. This is not only "a" plan for salvation, it is "the" plan. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Matthew's Gospel also brings out an important prophetic fulfillment regarding the title of Jesus as Immanuel. This title means "God with us" which is an important relationship aspect of the Messiah's advent. The Messiah reveals the heart of God as One who lives among us. The implications of Jesus being called Immanuel are twofold. First, Jesus came so that we might come to the Father through Him. Second Jesus moved into the neighborhood to stay in order to show us God's love so that we might live eternally with Him. Christianity is the only belief system that purports that God became a man and died for our sins. That is the powerful implication of Immanuel, God with us.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the second reading from Romans, Saint Paul also confirmed the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding Jesus. While these are introductory remarks and salutations, there are many meaningful truths contained here.

Second Reading:

1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-7)

It would be easy to read this passage casually and gloss over the deep insights, but Paul confirmed the following truths about Jesus and His people.

1. Jesus birth and ministry was predicted by Old Testament Scriptures (v.2).

2. Jesus would be born in the line of King David as to his earthly genealogy (v.3).
3. He would be the Son of God and as God would have the power to be resurrected from the dead (v.4a), and be filled with the Holy Spirit (v.4a).
4. He would be perfectly holy (v.4b).
5. He would be the Lord of the Church.
6. All grace would flow through Jesus (v.5)
7. Jesus would establish the apostles of the church, including Paul (v.5).
8. His Church would bring about obedience and faith (v.5).
9. Paul's ministry would extend to the Gentiles (v.5).
10. All believers would be called "saints" and, like the apostles, called out to ministry (v.7).

Saint Paul knew Jesus in a multi-faceted way, which should be a model for us as followers of Him today. Most importantly, we need to recognize Jesus as the Son of God who was raised from the dead and lived a holy life through the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can receive His grace. Receiving His grace means that I am now in good favor with the Father and I am declared righteous.

Reflection Questions

1. Review the list above from the second reading in Romans 1 about Jesus. Choose one point and think about how this truth affects your life.

2. What difference does it make to you to know that Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us"?

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