

JAMES ARCHER SERMONS [3]

Luke 2:10–11

A Discourse on Christmas Day

Ecce evangelizo vobis gandum magnum....quia hodie natus est vobis Salvator.

Behold I bring to you tidings of great Joy....Because this day is born a Saviour S^t Luke C². V^s 10 & 11.

If the prophets, my Dear Friends, were ever impatient on any occasion; it was on the expectation of this days news, this miraculous Birth, which brought into the World the Messiah so long wished for and sighed after. The Prophet Isaias declared that he would never cease from his importunities, *propter Sion non tacebo, et propter Jerusalem non quiescam*,^[1] till the Just one, ~~should appear~~, the Saviour should appear, who should shine as a burning Lamp and enlighten the whole World. They sometimes express their ardent desires of his coming in thus addressing themselves to the Heavens. Drop down dew ye Heavens from above, and let the clouds rain [on] the just. At other times to the Earth: Let the earth they pray, be opened and send forth a Saviour: at other times again they invoke his own omnipotent hand to

[¹ Isaias 62:1; “For Sion’s sake, I will not hold my peace, and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not rest...” (DRB)]

[2]

break through the Heavens and come down to their relief: O that thou wouldst rend the heavens, say they, and wouldst come down.

Great Prophets, your sighs are heard, your tears at last proved successful; your earnest demands are granted: the calamities of mankind and your mournful lamentations, have so far prevailed, that all things are now accomplished which were to precede the happy arrival of our long expected Messias. The royal Septre is made over to a stranger from the sons of Juda, as Jacob had foretold: Daniel’s seventy mysterious weeks are now expired: the Virgin, whom Isaias told King Acab, should be fruitful and bear a Son, has verified his prediction—he is this day borne at Bethlehem, and laid in a manger, and angelical Heralds are dispatched to proclaim to the world the joyful news: *Ecce evangelizo vobis gandum magnum &c* [etc].

But My Dear Friends, such a complication of mysterious circumstances occurs in this days Solemnity, that it [is] difficult to

[3]

determine where to begin or what to say, each one being a prodigy which furnished sufficient subject for several discourses, and to include all in one would create ~~nothing but~~ confusion; wherefore, laying aside at present the more visible and obvious circumstances of our dear Redeemer's birth, of which you are not ignorant, passing over, I say, in silence, the painful journey of his Blessed Mother to Bethlehem, her afflicting rejection when arrived there; the still more stupendous condescension of our Saviour to be born in a stable, his revealing himself first to poor and abject shepherds, inviting them to adore him, and inspiring them to become his first Evangelists: leaving, I say, these astonishing circumstances to your pious meditations, I shall content myself at present to dwell on the chief reason why this only Son of God was this day born to us: 1st by considering the unhappy state of mankind by the sin of our common parent Adam & 2ndly the blessings we received by the holy Birth of our Saviour: requesting your pious attention.

[4]

No condition can be well imagined more deplorable than to owe an immense sum, the payment of which is exacted under pain of perpetual imprisonment & horrid dungeons, and to be destitute of the means of paying even one farthing of the said sum: No condition more miserable than to remain under the sentence of being scourged & chastened during thousands of years for crimes committed without the power of making satisfaction for the least offence. This and worse than this was the unhappy condition of unfortunate man ever since the fall of our first Parent. His sin on that account St Austin calls great beyond measure by reason of the misery of that ineffable ruin as the same Holy Father styles it, with in which it involved his whole posterity. All the scourges of Heaven upon sinful man ever since the World's creation were just chastisements of his first rebellion: and yet had they been infinitely more they could never have restored him to his Maker's favor. All the sacrifices ever offered—all the virtues the World ever witnessed or admired, as the

[5]

Faith of Abraham, the patience of Job, the meekness of Moyses, the penance of David could not make satisfaction for the least crime. No man could be perfect to that degree, says St Ambrose as to make satisfaction for their sinful World: and the reason generally given by the Holy Fathers is, the greatness of God and the vileness of man: on the one hand there was an infinite Majesty offended, on the other a vile creature the offender: the offended was the supreme & absolute Lord and Master, ~~absolute and supreme proprietor~~ of all ~~that had a~~ beings in Heaven and on Earth: the criminal had nothing he could call his own; nothing but what already belonged to his offended Maker on various titles: on the one side, all power, all greatness, independence, Divinity, and Majesty: on the other, nothing but impotence, servitude, dependence, and baseness. This raises our sin and rebellion to such a degree of enormity, that the angelical Doctor St

Thomas calls it in some measure infinite[.] Peccatum contra Deum commissum quandam habet infinitatem[;^2] a sin committed against God has a certain infinity, because the Majesty offended is infinitely great, infinitely good,

[^2 See Aquinas, Thomas and Petrus Caramello, *Summa Theologiae, Cura Et Studio Sac. Petri Caramello, Cum Textu Ex Recensione Leonina*, Tomus III, Tertia Pars et Supplementum, Taurini: Marietti. 1952, Quaestio I, Articulus 2 (III, Q.1, Art.2, p.4). For an English translation, see Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Bros. ed., 3 vols. Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1947-48 (quotation in vol. II, p.2028). An online Latin version is available from *Corpus Thomisticum* at <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth4001.html>, and a Latin-English parallel version from the Dominican House of Studies, Priory of the Immaculate Conception at [http://dhspriory.org/thomas/summa/TP/TP001.html#TPQ1OUTP1.\]](http://dhspriory.org/thomas/summa/TP/TP001.html#TPQ1OUTP1.)

[6]

infinitely amiable; and man the offender infinitely inferior to him in all these divine attributes, which raises the guilt beyond the reach of human comprehension[.]

This, My Dear Friends, was the unfortunate state of mankind for above 2000 years, involved in an immense debt, guilty of an infinite malice, and at the same time destitute of the means of making the least satisfaction for what in justice was due. No mere creature however pure could repair our loss. ~~nothing less than a God could make condign satisfaction for the sins of men~~ Was ever a condition more miserable, ever a cause more desperate? Under such distressing circumstances, ~~what hope [....]~~ what remained for us but to be cast into prison for eternity! But behold and admire, My D^r [Dear] Friends, the mercy and bounty of our God in providing a remedy for our evils. The eternal Word, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, offers himself to become man, that he might be rendered capable of being made a sacrifice for the sins of men: A Sacrifice of infinite value, against which no exception could be made; because conformable

[7]

to the most rigorous rules of justice, and more than equal to our guilt; for this end, the fullness of time being come, appointed by the Almighty for the accomplishment of this great work of mercy, he was born of the B. V. Mary, an helpless infant, yet true God and true man. This is the Mystery; this is the mercy the Church commemorates at the present time; and this we are all invited with love and gratitude humbly to adore. Ought we not to exclaim in the words of the Prophet Jeremy: *Obstupescite[.] Cæli super hoc: Be astonished, all ye heavens at this.*^[3] Man has offended God, and this same God comes to satisfy for the very crime committed against him: Man, by pride, had affected to be like unto the most High: God that he might not perish for his insolence, submits to the greatest humiliations, and becomes the lowest and the outcast of Mankind: Man had abandoned his God, had made himself a slave of the Devil, God descends

[³ See Jeremiah 2:12.]

from his Throne of Glory, is born in a ruinous stable and laid in a manger, to rescue him from the tyrannical profession of the powers of darkness and the powers of darkness and

[8]

restore him to liberty. Doth not the humility of our God herein appear to us more wonderful than his power? Yes, the boundless power he manifested in creating the World out of nothing, and filling Heaven with Angels and the earth with men and an immense variety of creatures, was not so astonishing as the ineffable humiliations he underwent in man's redemption. Here, my D^r Friends, let us contemplate the eternal Word, the Omnipotent Son of God become an infant for our sake. Let us admire the wonderful invention of the divine mercy, and the excess of his love for us. The immense Word of the Almighty Father, has reduced himself to the state of a new born child! And why? S^t Paul tells us in a few but very expressive words: peccatores salvos facere,^[4] to save sinners, his declared enemies, who have often contemned his benefits, abused his graces, vilified his glory. blasphemed his Majesty: for the salvation of such undeserving creatures, he is this day miraculously born in a stable and laid in a manger; peccatores salvos facere[,] to rescue his treacherous Servants, his rebellious

[⁴ See 1 Timothy 1:15.]

[9]

creatures from eternal perdition and to exalt them to everlasting glory: This is the end for which he assumed our human nature, and there are the blessings we have received by his happy birth.

Contemplating then, My D^r Friends, this prodigy of God's mercy and goodness, considering his infinite tenderness and compassion for us, and the great things he has done for our salvation; have we not great reason to hope and place our whole confidence in him and to rejoice in so plentiful a redemption? How truly are verified to us in this mystery, these words which Almighty God commanded the Prophet Ezechial to say to the Israelites: As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live.^[5] How can we fear that he will refuse us his mercy, who has given us his only Son, through whom may we obtain it? What is yet to be done is much less than what he has already done for us; for it is much more wonderful for God to become man than for a sinner to obtain mercy through such a Redeemer: let not our hope then, cease but with our lives.

[⁵ See Ezechiel 33:11.]

[10]

But this unparalleled goodness of God towards man not only encourages us to hope in him, but also teaches us how great is our obligation of loving him with our whole hearts, without which our hope would be vain: In fact, how can we ~~refrain from loving him~~ refuse to him our love?: for if we seriously consider this mystery and reflect how infinite the love of God must be

for us, in sending his only and dearly beloved Son to become man, to suffer all kinds of contempt, the most cruel torments, and the most ignominious death on the Cross; and all this for the love of us and to exalt us, sinful dust and ashes to eternal glory; is it possible that we should not love him? Nay, is it possible even for the most hardened hearts, not to be mollified and the most frozen hearts not to be melted at the view of such manifest proofs of God's love for man? ~~What |must not| then must not be the sentiments of the spouses of Jesus Christ~~— [blank to margin] Must not then the hearts of the spouses and Disciples of Jesus Christ overflow with sentiments of love in celebrating this

[11]

Mystery of love?

~~But, My Dear Friends, the love which we ought to have for our Divine Saviour, ought not to consist in transient sentiments of our hearts~~

But, ~~My D^r Friends~~, Our Divine Redeemer requires of us a more solid proof of our love than some transient emotions of our hearts. He came not only to satisfy for and cancel the debt which we owed to the divine justice for our offences; but also to teach us not only by word of mouth, but by example, the virtues which through his merits, will conduct us to eternal life; and it is the constant practice of these that is the best and indeed the only test ~~|secure proof|~~ of our love for him[.] Let us then Dear Sisters repair, in spirit, to Bethlehem, let us enter the ruinous stable which the Lord of infinite glory chose for his birth; let us approach the manger, where he was layed and after having paid him the homage of our adoration & love, let us attentively listen to what he will there speak to our hearts.

Learn of me says he to us who for my love have embraced evangelical poverty to love and esteem your state, and to you, my

[12]

dear Children ~~you my friends~~, who may be hereafter possessed of worldly riches, not to be attached to them, but to relieve, at least with your superfluities, the wants of the poor, since I the Lord of the Universe, have no other clothing, than poor swaddling clothes, and no other cradle to repose in, than a manger.

Learn of me to be truly humble, every one esteeming others better than themselves, since I, who am the Most High, have humbled myself beneath all men, even to become the companion of beasts.

Learn of me to be truly meek, forgiving from your hearts them that offend you, since I who am the chief offended, do here water my hard couch with my tears to make attonement for the sins you have committed against me[.]

Learn of me patience in all your sufferings, since I, who am Omnipotent, lie here exposed in an open stable to the contempt of the World, and the rigour of the elements.

[13]

Learn of me obedience, because I, who am the King of Kings have submitted myself to the disposal and conduct of a tender Virgin.

Learn of me to love your Neighbour, since I who am the true God of the true God have made myself man for your sake.

Lastly, learn of me a true and real contempt of the perishable goods of this World, since I, who am the wisdom of God, have despised and rejected them as false and counterfeit [counterfeit], to teach you by my example the way to acquire those that are true and everlasting.

Such, My D^r Friends, are the divine Lessons, our new born Saviour gives us from his manger. Let us entreat him to imprint them so deeply in our hearts, that they may always appear in our conduct. Let us earnestly invite him, whose own ardent desire it is, to be spiritually born in our hearts. Let us humbly beseech him to prepare our souls

[12]

by his holy grace for his reception; to banish thence all inordinate affections, to fill us with his Holy Spirit, and ~~by it~~ thereby reign in all our affections, thoughts, and actions, that as by his nativity he is become all ours, so we may be altogether his: insomuch that we may be always able to say with the Apostle Rom. C. 8th[,] who shall separate us from the love of God?^[6] Animated by the example of our Blessed Redeemer who underwent so many humiliations and sufferings during the course ~~many years~~ of his mortal life for the love of us; and strengthened by frequently and devoutly receiving him under the Eucharistic veils, we shall be enabled to bear with patience and resignation all the evils of this life for the love of him, and hereafter come to the happy enjoyment of him in his heavenly Kingdom: ~~which may~~ a happiness which I sincerely wish you may our merciful and bountiful God grant us all. In the Name &c [etc].

^[6] See Romans 8:35–39.]