JAMES ARCHER SERMONS [9]

Luke 2:12

On Christmas Eve

Et hoc vobis signum: Invenietis infantem pannis involutum, et positum in præsepio.

And this shall be a sign to you: you shall find an Infant wrapt in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. Words taken out of 2nd C. of St Luke & 12th Verse.

Among the many Mysteries and Prodigies included in the Gospels on the Solemnity we are about celebrate, not one seems to convey more profitable instructions to us than this which is announced to in the words of the Angel to the Shepherds, this shall be a sign to you &c. [etc.] O Dear God! what a sign is this to discover to man the true Messiah and Saviour of the world! an infant wrapt in swaddling clothes, rags and laid in a manger, on a little straw, between an Ox and an Ass! What marks are these my D' Friends, to make known the greatness and Majesty of a God made man! And yet this conduct of humble Jesus has made a most admirable harmony both with the whole series of his ensuing Life, and the Divine Doctrine he was come to teach and confirm by his admirable example. This sign did not indeed accord with the depraved tast of the wise of this world, and herein are verified these words of our B. Saviour St Matt. C. 11th & v. 25. Abscondisti hoc a sapientibus et prudentibus et revelasti ea parvulis; thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones. Yes, My Dear Friends, these Mysteries were hid from the Wise and the Great of Judea and revealed to poor humble Shepherds, who guided by the light of Heaven, were made clearly to discern not only the majesty of a God concealed under the gloomy shades of Bethlehem, but moreover to discover the mysterious conformity of these humble Marks, with the dignity of the Person, whose happy birth they this night proclaimed.

I propose, my D' Friends, in the first part of this short entertainment, to expropose[1] to your pious consideration, some of the principal advantages accruing to us from the humble manner in which the Son of God came into the World. His great love for us in his humble Birth will be the subject of the second; and I shall conclude with a word of salutary advice concerning the accomplishment of the unbounded love of Jesus, in the holy Sacrament of the Eucharist; requesting the favor of your attention.

[1] An apparent correction of the repetitive “propose” to “expose” without strikethrough.

[3]
Part 1st

Hoc erit vobis signum &c.[etc.]\(^2\) This shall be to you a sign; you shall find an Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. Almighty God, intending to appear on earth, invested with human nature, could not descend in a condition more conformable to his greatness, and suitable to the designs of his Divine Providence, than in the manner expressed in my text, for had he been born with |in| all the magnificence and glory you can represent to yourselves,—were you to view

\(^2\) A slight modification of the opening Latin inscription. See Luke 2:12.]

4

him only in a cradle more glittering and brilliant, than ever was a Kings or an Emperors Throne, attended by the greatest monarchs and potentates of the Earth — prostrate with their Crowns and Sceptres at his sacred feet. If we seriously reflect, he will not appear so great as in the poor, forlorn stable and crib of Bethlehem; for so little is all worldly pomp and grandeur in the sight of divine Majesty; or to use the Words of the Royal Prophet, *sic ut nihilum ante te*, as a mere nothing before him;\(^3\) that even the flowers with which the dewy Spring bedecks the meadows, and the Lillies of the Valley are more richly clothed, according to the Son of Gods own word than Solomon himself in all his glory.\(^4\) Now is not he the Almighty God, the Creator and Maker of all the precious Perls and rich Jewels the Sea and Land afford? "Twould\(^5\) then have been unworthy of him to have borrowed lustre from these vain toys and vanities, which would have amused and attracted

\(^3\) See Psalm 38:6; “Behold thou hast made my days measurable: and my substance is as nothing before thee. And indeed all things are vanity: every man living.”


\(^5\) “Twould” — A contracted form of “it would.”

5

the weak minds the attention of worldly minded people, more to the exterior ornaments, than to the divine Treasure there contained: how despicable therefore is all worldly grandeur to the heavenly Babe who was pleased there should be a sort of infinity between his unparalled humiliation and his ineffable greatness, passing from the summit of glory to the lowest abyss of abjection; so that there should be no degree of contempt beneath him, as there was no degree of Majesty above him, possessing all things in Heaven and here deprived of every accommodation in |on| a earth stable. Thus My Dear Friends did the Son of the eternal Father confound the pride of our wicked enemy, crush the head of the infernal serpent, and triumph over his audacious malice. O happy Crib of Jesus! how glorious do you appear in |to| the eyes of all that are truly wise! Happy Crib that contains the divine Majesty who ballances with one finger the whole universe! Blessed clothes, which dry up the stains of our
sins and tears! O sacred tears of the heavenly Babe! how beneficial to our souls for the gaining of eternal life! See here; My D’ Friends, in infirmity what strength in infirmity! in poverty, what riches! in humility, what Majesty! or to express myself in the words of an ancient Father: Occulta in membris infantis potentia Majestatis;[6] in the Limbs [members] of an Infant lies hid the power of Majesty. Though every action of our Blessed Saviour during his whole life is of infinite value, yet none (his bitter death and passion excepted) appears to us so great and meritorious as his astonishing humble Birth. even then he made the first offering of all the ignominies he was to endure on the Cross, and accepted from the hands of his eternal Father the future bitter Chalice of his sacred Passion. Moreover if we consider the evils he came to remedy, could he have so well delineated the extreme opposition between him and them, as he did by his surprising poor and humble birth in a base and forlorn stable! The consideration of this caused S’ Austin to address himself


[7] to human nature in these or the like expressions. O man thou wast lost in coveting to be like unto God; but thy God has redeemed thee in becoming little like unto thee: An unfortunate curiosity made thee aspire to be like unto God | the knowledge of Good and Evil, and behold thy God appears in a base and humble Crib, as if invested with thy misfortune, thereby to confound thy pride and arrogance: thou aboundest with plenty and ease, and see thy God in extreme want of all things, depriving himself of the usual commodities of human life, and engaged to toil and labour for thee from his very Nativity | Birth. O excess of love! O abyss of Mercy and Charity towards | for| us! What practical lessons of obedience, poverty & humility are exhibited this night in the stable of Bethlehem! If example has any ascendance over the human heart, how ought not the example of Jesus to move the hearts of all mankind? The meanness of the stable confounds the pomp and grandure of the World; the poverty of the Crib gives a mortal stab to the insatiable |insatiate| passion after wealth and riches: the meekness of the

[8] Divine Babe in suffering injuries, puts pride and ambition to the Blush, and his tears and sufferings overwhelm the soft, the nice and delicate with shame and confusion. What vice is
there that the infant Jesus of Bethlehem does not reprove and confound? and what virtue that he does not set an heroic example of? Ah! My D’ Friends, what heavenly instructions are imparted to us from the Crib of Bethlehem! enough not only to excite and animate the virtuous to a generous perseverance in the practice of their religious exercises, but even to dissolve the stony hearts of the most obdurate sinners. It is not however to these that I now address myself but to those whose love towards their Creator, has caused them to renounce all the World esteems valuable [holds in the in the highest estimation]. I shall | I do| not therefore be prolix in speaking of the |deem it necessary to say much on the| excessive love the Blessed Infant manifests towards us, and of the reciprocal love we ought to return him, which is the subject of my second part.

Part 2nd

Were a most tender Parent or the dearest Friend we had in the World, blessed with all felicity and innocently enjoying all the lawful pleasure and happiness the earth could afford, at once reduced to the greatest misery |extremity| of poverty and want, pains and sufferings, purely through our fault and misconduct, through our extravagances and offences, how should we lament and deplore our folly? This, My Dear Friends, is our case, in respect to God though in as much greater a degree, as the Majesty of God is above the low condition of man, and who consequently above all creatures claims our love. The son of God, equal to to his eternal to his eternal Father in all things, who was in the enjoyment of infinite and eternal happiness in the bosom of his Father, through his excessive love for us, descended from Heaven (without however quitting it, this being an expression which denotes this extreme humiliation of the son of God by his incarnation) descended I say from his seat of glory, took upon him our human nature in the womb of a poor Virgin, and is this day born of her in a cold winters night, in a poor ruinous stable and is laid in a manger. And for whom all this? for thee o man, whosoever thou art, for each one [of] us in particular, is the man as the Prophet Nathan said to David, *tu es ipse vir*[:]

[10]

thou are the very man, whose sins have called forth & his own infinite love for us have brought down the son of God from his royal throne into an abyss of miseries and sufferings T’was for the love of us that he made choice of no better accommodation for his Birth than a little straw to lie on betwixt an Ox and an Ass; ’twas for the love of us that he enters a life of bitter sufferings, to be succeeded by a death of inexpressible torments. Ah! My Dear Friends, what return shall we make for such an immense love and mercy towards us? Shall we not join our tears with those of our loving Saviour to bewail our sins? Shall we not offer him our hearts with teeming [7 See 2 Kings 12:7.]
sentiments of the most ardent love and sincerest gratitude? Let us, in order to excite and obtain these sentiments frequently repair in Spirit to the stable of Bethlehem and there contemplate the extatic love of the Blessed Virgin Mother towards her divine Infant Son, whom she adores with all the affections of her pure heart and immaculate Soul and also join ourselves with S't Joseph and the devout Shep[herds] in adoreing with them this blessed Babe [Infant].

Let us make him the daily offering of the first fruits of all our Christian and Religious Duties and pious employments; let us cheerfully accept of and punctually comply with them for the sake of our meek and humble Jesus, and let us conjure him to bind our hearts so indissolubly to him with the chains of ardent love that we may say with S't Paul Rom. C. 8. & V. 35. Who (or what) shall separate us from the love of God? from the love and union of our hearts to the divine Infant Jesus? Shall any sloth or negligence, any difficulties we find in the compliance with our religious duties and obligations? No! all these we will overcome for the sake of and in him who strengthens us. Ah! My Dear Friends, may these be ever the sentiments and dispositions of our hearts, may the love of Jesus appear in all our actions, the love of Jesus ever possess our Souls; so that we may always have prepared an acceptable abode for the Lamb of God, when ever he is pleased to make us a visit us in the holy Eucharist, of which I am briefly to speak in the remaining part of my Discourse.

Imagine, My Dear Friends, you now hear the Divine Infant calling out to us from his little Crib [manger]: *Veni*te ad me omnes – *Dis*cite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde: come to me all of you – Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart. Come and learn of me to despise the false pleasures and deceitful vanities of the world, and to walk in the path of penance and mortification – the way of the Cross – Learn to love me as I have loved you, and here begin to offer myself a sacrifice for you. *Veni*te ad me come to me et ego reficiam vos and I will refresh you with my one divine self,[8] but alas! if not aided by the divine light, what refreshment can we expect in a poor stable from a little helpless Infant laid in a manger covered with straw! but when we hear the holy Angels sounding forth his praises and filling the Earth with their melody with a Gloria in Excelsis Deo Glory be to God on high, and filling the Earth with their melody, we are moved to cry out with the wise men, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? Bethlehem is the happy spot of land, the stable and crib are his Palace

[8 See Matthew 11:28–29.]
[† The lower half of page 12, comprising all or a portion of thirteen lines, and all or a portion of the first four lines of page 13, have been marked with a large “x,” indicating these sections were to be omitted from the sermon. Three diagonal lines appear to demarcate the beginning and ending points of this exclusion. In all other respects, the stricken text has been transcribed accordingly.]
and throne: here is the abode of the only son of God in human flesh; who invites us to come to
him, and he will refresh us with his own divine self; 

*saying to us, *for he that eateth this bread shall live forever* [yes, and shall live forever]. O how great is our happiness My Dear Friends; to be so near our God, who Our loving Saviour not only invites us to come to | approach him, but even condescends to come to us and to take up his abode in the Center of our Hearts; our hearts then ought to be this night and every blessed Communion day, the Bethlehem, the stable and Crib of the Divine Infant. What preparation shall we make for so heavenly a guest? We will endeavor, by the assistance of divine grace, to wash away all the stains of what all the stains of sin and dross of imperfections, we may have contracted, by hearty sorrow and penance, so that the amiable and necessary virtue of humility may find entrance into our hearts, and fix the foundation of a happy preparation in our Souls, as it disposed the ever immaculate

Virgin for the sacred fruit of her blessed Womb, she this night brought forth and laid in a
manger. Then we will more attentively with renewed attention consider who it is we are about to receive into the closet and crib of our breasts, that it is no less than the son of God, the Divine Infant, the heavenly Babe, [9] born this night at Bethlehem, and who now is pleased to condescends to be born again in our Souls. Oh to what a summit of honor and favor is human nature exalted, by this singular pledge of infinite bounty! S't Elisabeth visited by the Blessed Virgin sometime [a short time] after her conception of this Divine Infant, thus in an Extasy of joy, love and admiration exclaims *Unde hoc mihi ut veniat Mater Domini mei ad me*, whence is this favor to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? S't Luke C. 1 & V. 43. With what raptures of love then ought not we to be seized, who have the honor to be visited by the only begotten Son of God himself: methinks we ought to have esteemed it too great a favor, had we been only admitted to the stable at Bethlehem, there to have paid our due homage and adoration


towards our celestial |heavenly| new born King; but as he is pleased mercifully to come himself to us in person, and even to take up his abode in the Centre of our hearts, we cannot do less than, with the utmost astonishment and in the profoundest sentiments of humility cry out, *unde hoc nobis*; whence is this to us, how comes it to pass, that we poor mortals, worms of the earth should be so highly honoured and favoured? It is, my D't Friends, through the excess of love and ardent desire, the Divine Infant has for our eternal welfare: It is to engage our affections to his
sacred person. Oh! let our hearts then be for ever be united to him; let them burn with seraphic flames of Divine Love, not only this aweful night, but at all those happy times, we approach and receive this most amiable infant Son of God, whether actually in the holy Communion, or spiritually as often as we assist at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass: So that we may be ever able to say with S¹ Paul Gal: C 2. & V. 20. *Vivo autem, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*;]

[16]

I live, now not I: but Christ liveth in me; that we may faithfully love, serve and adore him all the days of our lives, and hereafter be found worthy to behold him face to face in his Glory, is my sincere wish to you all ardent prayer for us all. In the Name of &c. [etc.]