

Today's collect has overtones of Advent, particularly the petition, "Grant that we may joyfully receive him for our Redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our Judge." Then we get to the Epistle lesson, and St. Paul admonishes us to live "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." So the theme of living in righteousness so that we are prepared for the second coming of Christ is prevalent. One big difference, however, is that while we were in Advent, the focus was upon waiting; there was a sense of anticipation, an awareness of the "not yet happened." Here, on Christmas day, we focus especially upon what has happened. The Christ, in the person of a human baby, has appeared and lived among us. God has entered into History; humanity has been redeemed; and the Name given to Jesus, "Emmanuel, God with us," is no longer prophetic; it is realized.

God was with us as a living, breathing, physical human in the person of Jesus Christ, born in that manger 2000 years ago. God is now with us, still as a living, breathing, physical human, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, so that the image of Christ is impressed upon our lives. Christ now is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, but He daily gives himself to us in love and grace through His Word, through His Church particularly in the sacraments, and through the love and encouragement that we receive from our fellow believers, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are no longer in a state of anticipation for His presence, we are in a state of blessed enjoyment of His presence.

That really is our message today. The coming of Jesus at Christmas does not subject us to a dour, ascetic, austere life. Being a Christian is not a punishment. It is a liberation, and this must bring us joy. We are redeemed, united to God when we were once far off and hopeless. This is the message of Christmas. Put off your sackcloth and brighten your countenance; for God is with Us.

We the Redeemed, of all people, have much to celebrate this morning. The angels filled the sky with glory, light, and praises at the birth of Christ. The shepherds hurried to see the newborn babe, and then told everyone they met about the amazing things they had witnessed. "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them." The magi came from afar to offer presents to the newborn king. A new star even shone in the heavens declaring the Glory of God. So too, are we this day exhorted to bring our praises and thanksgivings to God, for He has done amazing things for us. St. Paul in the Titus reading does call us to a life of carefulness and circumspection; but these admonitions are wrapped around our blessed hope. Our collect begins, "O God, who makest us GLAD with the yearly remembrance of the birth of ... Jesus Christ...." It then continues with, "Grant that as we JOYFULLY receive him for our Redeemer."

Does the birth of Christ make you glad, not just for this season, but for everyday of your life? Because we have so much for which we can be joyful. Today, your savior, Jesus

Christ, is born in Bethlehem. New life has entered the world. New life has been given to you. Rejoice, Be Glad, Praise God. My prayer for us all is that we, like the shepherds of old, would tell it abroad to everyone we meet, "Christ is born! Christ is born!" AMEN.