

Men's Forum

December 5, 2013

Good Christian Men Rejoice – Celebrating the Truth that is from Above

- **THREEFOLD OFFICE OF CHRIST**

- Today we begin three part series for Advent and Christmas
- Celebrate the coming or advent of Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary, and the Son of God
- We call him “Christ” – not a name but a title
- In Aramaic, Messiah, translated, “anointed one”
- In OT, kings were anointed, priests were anointed, and in that outward ritual anointing with oil there was a sign of their appointment and authorization by God – the oil is a sign of inward anointing with the Holy Ghost
- In the case of the prophets, who are not “institutional” offices, this anointing was only inward – they speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost
- So the term “Christ”, anointed one, refers to the anointing of the Spirit, for the work of a king, of a priest, or of a prophet
- And in fact all three – theologians speak of the threefold office of Christ – that he was anointed with the Spirit to be prophet, priest, and king
- These correspond to the three chief aspects of the human soul or personality – the prophet to the good of the mind or intellect or reason, which is to know the truth; the priest to the good of the will which is to love the good; the king to the good of the emotions, affections, appetites, which is in rational obedience of truth and love, freely to enjoy the beautiful

- **Prophets of OT**

- They are “mouths” of the Lord – the Holy Ghost speaks by the prophets, they speak the words he puts into their mouths to speak – Jeremiah 1:7-9 – they are messengers, sent by him to speak his messages for him –
- stern words of warning but also bold and encouraging words of promise – judgment, and mercy
- many prophets – above all,
 - Moses (1st era of Sojourning, Abraham to David) and
 - Elijah (2nd era of the Kingdom, from David to Babylonian captivity) –
- they remind us that prophets do not only speak with God's authority, they are also empowered to act with his authority – works of divine power, miracles, even raising the dead
- in the last era of Israel's history is the period from exile to Babylon to the coming of Christ – era of captivity among the nations –
- great prophet of this era is John the Baptist
- preacher of judgment to come, who called Israel to repentance and baptism for the remission of sins
- proclaimed the nearness of Messiah

- suffered a martyr's death
- Administered baptism to Jesus, on which occasion Jesus was first manifest as the Spirit-anointed Christ and Son of God
- When John went to prison, Jesus stood up in his place, and continued his preaching
- He proclaimed as John did, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:18), and called men to believe "the gospel of God"
- One of his first sermons is recorded in Luke 4:16-21
- He begins by reading a passage from Isaiah 61:
 - **The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.**
- Jesus identifies himself as the Spirit-anointed prophet who proclaims the gospel of God's free gift of forgiveness of sins, justification and regeneration of sinners – the liberation of Israel from its captivity, that it may be God's own holy people
- No surprise that Jesus is frequently identified in minds of people and even disciples as prophet
- And when the question of his identity comes up, he is spoken of as Elijah returned, or second Moses, or John the Baptist raised from the dead
- They recognize in him in the highest degree the authority and power of God's own word
- It is Peter, famously, who first recognizes and confesses that Jesus is not just a prophet:
 - **"Thou art the Christ" he says, "the Son of the living God"**
- Confession confirmed eight days later on the holy mount, when Peter, James and John witness Jesus transfigured, and engaged in conversation with the prophets Moses and Elijah
- Peter volunteers to build three tabernacles – memorials of the occasion, one for Jesus, one for Moses, one for Elijah – though Peter confessed Jesus as Christ, he puts him on same level as prophets
- Voice from heaven corrects him: **"This is my beloved Son" (not them) and adds "hear him"**
- As Son of God, Jesus speaks with an authority greater than any prophet
- Difference recognized in Heb. 1:1 **'God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son ...'** Christmas epistle
- It is John, however, who makes clear what the difference is, when he calls God's Son the Word of God :
 - Christmas gospel: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not".**

- In the primary distinction of Creator and creature, the Word is on the side of the Creator – he is not a creature, he is God –
- Wonderfully, however, **“the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”** – the uncreated Word remaining God yet also becomes a human creature – and in his own person bridges the infinite distance of Creator and Creature, God and man
- What of this title Word? Hinted at in Mt of Transfiguration, “Hear him”
- His distinction from God is that he is God’s Word – he is himself the revelation of God, God’s own knowing, which is of God himself, an infinite wisdom capable of comprehending all that God is – so though distinct from God he is not other than God – for God’s being is fully present in God’s knowing
- So when the Word is made flesh, God’s full glory is revealed in him
- **“and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth”**
- Jesus is not just the messenger, he is the message
- He doesn’t reveal God by pointing to something that is other than himself – God is revealed in and through him
- As he tells Philip, “he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father also” John 14:9
- When we look at the visible humanity of Jesus, we are seeing what St. Paul tells the Colossians (1:18) is **the image of the invisible God** – God as it were translated into human terms
- Because Jesus is the Son of God, the Word of God, the Image of God, he is able to teach the wisdom of God completely and perfectly, and with authority clarifies God’s will and intention in the law, his will and intention in the gospel
- **Necessity of the Incarnation**
- Because men were immersed in things audible, visible, tangible, and had lost sight of the invisible things of spirit, God’s Word was made audible, visible, tangible, so that thus meeting us at our own level, he might raise us to the knowledge of things invisible and intangible, the invisible kingdom of eternal Spirit
- This is the principle of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments still – God’s word made audible in human words, Christ’s body and blood made visible and tangible in the Sacraments
- Principle of ceremony, music, ornament in Church’s worship – the beauty of holiness made audible, tangible, visible
- Principle too of “sacramentality” of everyday life – God is to be found in the most mundane tasks or painful experiences – for those with eyes to look for him, and see him
- Principle of Christmas – that the God of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, comes to meet us in the child of Bethlehem – divine power manifest paradoxically in human weakness

- **TRUTH SENT FROM ABOVE**

- There is an old carol which tells us something important about Christmas

This is the truth sent from above,
The truth of God, the God of love;
Therefore don't turn me from the door,
But hearken all, both rich and poor (lat 17th or 18th c)

- Christmas is first of all a celebration for the Truth that is given from above – God's gift is that we might know him, and kingdom, his righteousness, his saving purpose, so far as we are capable of knowing him
- Mark 4:11 "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God"
- In a technological pragmatic industrial culture like ours, we think of knowledge largely in utilitarian terms – knowledge of how to do something, or make something – knowledge as a means of power, knowledge as skill or techne
- And of course knowledge does give us knowledge how
- But the greatest inventions have often been found by accident, by people who were just "playing" around, seeking knowledge for its own sake
- A hint that knowledge as techne is only one form of knowledge, and not the highest
- Knowledge is itself good – because man by his nature desires to know – he is a rational creature, and knowledge of the truth is the good of the intellect, it satisfies us in a fundamental way of being human
- John 8:32 "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"
- Though knowledge of the truth is not the only good of man, it is the highest one
- Yet Knowledge, rather than love, is the essence of true happiness, for knowledge is possession and enjoyment of the beloved (it is through knowing something that we have it)
- to possess in knowledge what we love is happiness indeed –
- John 17:3: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent"
- Christmas is thus a celebration of truth from above – it is the glad receiving and enjoyment of the revelation of God's glory in Jesus Christ, which has come to us like light in the darkness, dawn after a long night, knowledge and understanding after puzzlement, perplexity, confusion, chaos
- Oddly enough modern Christians are often prejudiced against knowledge, and above all against pure knowledge
- So often we hear "too heavenly minded to be any earthly good" – but it is only by being heavenly minded that we can be of any earthly good
- Yes it is possible for Christians to be in love in abstract, merely academic knowledge – all head no heart is not a recipe for a Christian life – we are indeed to will and to feel what we believe – point which will be addressed in the next two weeks – but we can't will and feel what we do not believe, we cannot love or lie what we don't know

- It belongs to our dignity and calling as Christians consciously to will God's eternal will, which is nothing else than God himself
- The alternative is darkness, ignorance, reckless, despair
- Feed yourself with truth
- Store up in your memory and understanding the words and teachings of Scripture, seek to understand them with your mind, with good teachers, good books, good sermons, by reflection and study
- Episcopalians belong to a tradition that gave the English bible – but they don't read it, and what they read they don't remember
- They belong to a tradition of Creeds – but they are often vague and willful in their own ideas about the historic faith and are indifferent or relativistic about doctrine
- We live in an age of radical liberal reinvention and reimaging of the Christian faith in willful ways – but unfortunately conservatives are weak in their own knowledge and love of revelation – vacancy that liberals move into easily
- Here's the spiritual bottom line: the mind that is not filled with the brightness of truth, will be easy prey for lies, halftruths, fantasies, deceptions, and frauds of all kinds – fill your mind with truth – and it will make you free, and you will live eternally.
- Prayer of St. Chrysostom – “knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come, life everlasting”