



ABOUT THE PROPERS

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



The Nativity of Our Lord

December 25, 2020



The Word Became Flesh

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Christmas Day is the festival of the Incarnation: the eternal Son of God was born in time as the son of Mary so that in his flesh he might free us from the bondage of sin. From the beginning, the solution to sin was the flesh and blood of God. Therefore today we rejoice in Jesus' Nativity. God in man has come to us to live, die, and rise again to set us free.

The Propers

The Propers are those portions of the service that change (or, are “proper” to) each Sunday or season of the church year. The Propers differ from the Ordinary (from the Latin ordo, which means “regular order”) portions of the liturgy, which do not change (e.g. the Lord's Prayer). The Propers offer the variety to the worship service and emphasize particular worship themes throughout the liturgical calendar.

First Lesson ¹

Isaiah 52:7-10

The return of Israel from captivity prefigured the work of the Word made flesh who redeemed mankind from sin. The prophecy pictures the watchmen of Jerusalem standing sentinel on the city walls. Suddenly they see messengers descending the mountains that surround Zion. The watchmen shout for joy because the messengers bring news of peace, goodness and rescue: Your God reigns! God is in control and is ruling for his people. He laid bare his holy arm by hiding himself in flesh in order to buy back Jerusalem—not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. God kept his promise, and all the ends of earth will see his salvation.

Second Lesson ¹

Hebrews 1:1-9

The arrival of God in the flesh inaugurated the last age of this earth. In Jesus Christ all the promises God made were kept. In this age of promises kept, God's interaction with mankind fundamentally changed. In the past God sent angels and prophets as messengers to his people. But in these latter days, God sent the One who made the universe and who sustains it by the breath of his mouth. God sent the Son who is the exact representation of God's being and the radiance of his glory. This is the One who came to speak to the people of God. This is the One who took on flesh and blood and became a companion of man—for one purpose: purification of our sins.

Gospel of the Day ¹

John 1:1-14

John's Christmas story begins in eternity within the Godhead. That the Son is eternally God and that he shared in the creation of the universe only underscores the enormity of his condescension to become man. In a paucity of words Scripture describes the indescribable: “And the Word flesh became and tented among us.” How shocking that this had to be true! God had to become flesh and blood to be born under law, to suffer, and to die that he might redeem us. John's expression, “He tented among us,” recalls the tabernacle of the Exodus that moved with the people of God in the desert. God was there beneath the skins. So with Christ, God's glory could be seen as he came in grace and truth, in flesh and blood, to give us the right to be children of God.

Psalm of the Day

Psalm 98

Like the angels who heralded the birth of Christ, the psalm leads us in proclaiming the praise of God for his grace in sending his Son.

Verse of the Day

Galatians 4:4,5a

“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law.” At the precise moment of God’s choosing, he fulfilled his long-prophesied promise to send his Son, the Savior, into the world. He humbled himself to be born as a human, and therefore accountable to God’s law, so that he might save lawbreakers from their sins with his sacrifice of blood.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, grant that the birth of your one and only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old bondage under the yoke of sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Hymn of the Day

35 “Of the Father’s Love Begotten” (Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, 348- c. 413)

The Nicene Creed was written as a statement of faith that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are all of the same nature, three and yet one. This Trinitarian hymn, with very ancient roots, is a confession of faith about the Christ, the eternal Son of God, whose birth and saving ministry were the fulfillment of ancient prophecies (vv. 1-3). The final stanzas are a doxology inspired by John’s visions recorded in Revelation 4-7 (vv. 4-5).

Church Year Season ¹

Christmas

The Christmas season celebrates the Incarnation of the Son of God. The eternal Word became flesh that he might be the Christ, anointed to redeem God’s people. God had to become man to live under the law and die in our place. Christ’s birth, then, is inextricably connected to his death: Good Friday necessitated Christmas. So great is the love of God that even though our sin required such a sacrifice, the Light of the world still descended into our darkness.

Colors & Symbolism

Christmas: White

White is the color of our Triune God and heaven. It also symbolizes joy, celebration, gladness, light, purity and innocence. We receive these blessings through faith because Christ, our righteousness Savior, has forgiven all our sins.

Minor Festivals ¹

St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr (December 26); St. John, Apostle and Evangelist (December 27); The Holy Innocents, Martyrs (December 28)

In the fourth and fifth century, the Western Church established a triduum of martyr festivals on December 26, 27, and 28 to commemorate St. Stephen, St. John, and the Holy Innocents. Medieval commentators suggest that these three festivals reveal the triple kind of martyrdom endured by the faithful: St. Stephen, martyrdom in will and deed; St. John, martyrdom in will but not in deed; the Holy Innocents, martyrdom in deed but not in will. Finally, on January 1, the Church celebrates the circumcision and naming of Jesus, Son of Mary and Son of God.

Nain Paraments

Christmas

Superfrontal: “Immanuel” is Hebrew for “God with us.” This name for Jesus Christ was revealed to God’s people through Isaiah in a prophecy of the Savior’s birth (7:14). The angel Gabriel announced to Joseph in a dream that the child in the Virgin Mary’s womb would be that promised Immanuel – God who had come to be with us (Matthew 1:23) in order to save us. Sometimes the name is spelled *Emmanuel*, which is the Latin alphabet transliteration of the Hebrew pronunciation of the same name.

The vines next to Immanuel represent the spiritual life that Jesus, the vine brings to God’s children, the branches (John 15:5).

Lectern antependium: *The Greek Cross*: distinguished by four arms of equal length.

Pulpit antependium: *The Celtic Cross*: similar to the Latin cross (†), but with a circle surrounding the center, which symbolizes the eternal nature of Christ and the gift of eternal life to all who believe in him.

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author and Editor.

³ Courtesy of “Advent Worship Suggestions” from the Nebraska District (of the WELS) worship committee.

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