

LECTURER NOTES DECEMBER 2011

Advent to the Manger – Salvation Has Come!!!

“Away in a manger no crib for His bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head. The stars in the heavens looked down where He lay, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay. The cattle are lowing, the poor baby wakes but little Lord Jesus no crying He makes. I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky and stay by my bedside, till morning is nigh. Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care and take us to heaven to live with Thee there.”

Away in a Manger – Lutheran Cradle Hymn

What a great hymn! I remember singing this hymn in early elementary school at a Christmas pageant. That was when they used to allow God in the schools and they tried to keep foolish behavior out. That’s all changed now. In elementary school I wondered what a manger was but it never occurred to me to look it up. That’s changed too. When I returned to the Church (after a 25 year hiatus) I was confronted with all kinds of terminology that was mysterious, unfamiliar and intimidating. Was this some kind of secret meant to confuse people like me? At first I thought so, but boy was I wrong! It wasn’t that the Church was trying to confuse me; it was that I was lazy.

What I found was an explanation that I could understand if I was willing to work hard to find the answer. For example, since it’s December let’s look at the wood of the manger as one of the three trees in salvation history. We can do that by considering some seemingly unrelated passages. First, to lay the groundwork, near the end of the book of Revelation the apostle John tells us that “nothing unclean” will enter heaven. That means “no sinners allowed”, or people like us. If mankind was to have any hope of entering heaven God would have to have some way to reverse the effect of the sin of Adam.

After the fall of Adam when original sin entered into the world, any hope of eternal joy in heaven would have been lost but for God’s promise of redemption. If you recall, God told Adam that he was “free to eat the fruit of any of the trees in the garden except the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” This was a living tree whose living fruit brought death to all mankind. **We can consider this the first tree in the story of the fall and redemption of mankind.** But sin is not more powerful than God, and His will wasn’t to be outdone by the foolishness of a man.

I looked up ‘manger’ at my usual place, www.merriam-webster.com, and this is what I found: a manger is a “trough or open box in a stable designed to hold feed or fodder for livestock.” So hungry animals go to the feedbox to eat and be sustained, hmmm. The manger is made from the wood of a dead tree. Merriam-Webster gives us additional information on the origin of the word as follows;

Middle English mangeour, manger, from Anglo-French mangure, from manger to eat, from Latin manducare to chew, devour, from manducus glutton, from mandere to chew. It also forms the root of the Latin word for jaw, or mandible, the structure that chews. So, God is pretty smart because this particular manger was destined to hold the bread of life.

We can consider the manger that baby Jesus was laid in to be the second tree in the story of the fall and redemption of mankind.

This is perhaps one of the greatest stumbling blocks for the average person in the pews. We live in an age when television has taught us to be lazy and we have developed a short attention span. In 30 to 60 minutes the answer to the mystery movie will be given to us anyway. Not so for God. He doesn’t just throw answers at us.

God didn’t want us to have the answer without some knowledge of its value; He wanted us to work for it. Jesus told us as much in the parable of the narrow gate: ***“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.”*** **Matthew 7:13-14**

As I mentioned earlier, some of us mistakenly think that the Church is trying to hide things from us. It is God, ever the gentleman, who is giving us the gift of

himself enclosed in a beautifully wrapped package, hidden from view so as not to cheapen the gift. And we, His bride, are the only ones intended to receive something so precious. What a gift, what love! We are so undeserving.

The third tree in the story of salvation history will make its appearance on Good Friday in the wood of the cross. To undo the sin of Adam (picking and eating the fruit he was told to avoid) Jesus would carry the dead tree of the cross and allow the sins of man to replant and hang him on it. Jesus himself became the dead fruit from the dead tree that we must eat to have eternal life. The cross is the tree of life.

This is the beautifully wrapped gift that God has given us. Even the simple manger had a terribly large part to play in the story because it revealed the baby Jesus as the Bread of Life, our Eucharistic food.

The December business meeting is on Tuesday December 6th at 7:00pm. Mass for the deceased Knights of this council is on Friday, December 9th at 5:45pm followed by adoration and confession and a rosary led by the knights of this council; please come and join us. Let's all make a good confession this month and pray that God give politicians the grace to seek Him and do His will throughout the year. Pray for the intentions of the Pope. Pray that Catholics be drawn to the Cross and conversion of heart. Pray that brother Knights seek God's peace.

