

Christmas Midnight Mass

You shall have no other gods.
What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.
This commandment is at the base of our entire Christian life.
It is the foundation for all of your thoughts; all of your words and all of your deeds.
Whether we are speaking of rebellion, murder, adultery, thievery or slander, all begins with the fear and love of God.
And it makes sense when we consider the power of the almighty God.
We see the cloud and majesty and awe on Sinai's height and we are afraid.
We consider His return in judgment with all the holy angels with Him and tremble.
Who would not fear such a God? and take His Word and commandments seriously?
We see Him take on the sins of the world--bearing all things for our sake.
We see Him provide for all of our needs of body and soul.
Who would not love such a God? and feel completely taken care of by Him?
But tonight we have other images in mind.
Tonight we speak of a God who lies on the breast of His Virgin mother.
We consider a God who can neither walk or talk or even eat solid food.
Can you fear, love and trust in Him above all things?
How can you trust in an infant? Trust Him to do what?
What strength does He have? What will-power does He have?
Can He even make a decision for you?
Few actually believe that a baby can make a decision for Christ.
And what about love?
Dote on-yes. Adore, OK. Have the warm fuzzies for Him--by all means.
But in what sense can you love an infant God?
And then, there's the word "fear."
In what possible sense could you be afraid of a newborn baby boy?
What harm could He possibly do to you? What threat does He hold?
It is true that King Herod was threatened by Him.
But not really by Him. Herod was afraid of what He would become--a King.
But Herod didn't hold any fear for the infant--otherwise He would have thought twice before unleashing his soldiers to attack the child.
And this gives us an insight into how ALL human flesh regards the infant God.
He is ignored. He is re-imaged. He is disregarded.
Herod disregarded the infant Christ as a present reality and only thought of Him as an adult challenger to the throne.
In doing so, Herod did what every man is wont to do.
How do you disregard the present Jesus?
What kind of Jesus must you imagine Him to be before you can fear, love and trust in Him above all things?
That is the question before you tonight.
In order to have a clearer answer to this question, let's first outline the basic problem.
What is it about the infant Jesus that inhibits a full fear and trust in Him?
Certainly it is the impossibility of the notion that the Almighty God could be so small.
...the impossibility that the eternal word is unable to speak.
...the scandal that the omnipresent God is placed in a manger in Bethlehem.

And because of the clash of these opposites, humans reason that one or the other must be an illusion.
Some figure that God really isn't an infant in the manger.
Rather, God remains in heaven with all of His power, might, wisdom and strength and that this baby is only a small token of His much larger presence.
In this scenario, it is still not the infant Jesus who is feared and loved and trusted.
Rather, it is a bodiless God who threatens us quite apart from this child.
Or it is some mighty deity who promises to take care of us and do things that this new-born Himself could not possibly do.
You do this not only with the infant in the manger, but anytime you encounter the all-too-human realities in the Church.
Because of all the human faults and foibles, we imagine that God doesn't really, REALLY deal with us through human means.
After all, we think, God couldn't possibly convey all of His power through human words, or through bread and wine, or through baptismal water.
These must be only tokens of His real presence -- ways of assuring us that He is really taking care of business behind the scenes and quite apart from flesh and blood.
Others might take a different tack. They let the infant Jesus remain the infant Jesus but deny Him any power, wisdom or strength.
This was the tack of Herod, who saw Him as a man and nothing more.
To be dealt with as a man, trusted as a man and accorded the strength of any man.
Perhaps a hero man or a super man, but still only a man.
Thus God in Christ is cute and lovable, beautiful and innocent--but really devoid of power.
We do this when we consider His commandments as suggestions.
...When we fearlessly go our own way and live according to the world's wisdom.
We do this when we consider the Gospel of God as a good news but powerless to bring about the necessary change.
And so we seek to augment God's Word with our own Gospel.
The forgiveness of sins is stiffened up by putting teeth into the Gospel: "I'll forgive you this time, but not any more after that."
Faith alone is not enough, you better also have works, or you are going down.
Do you see how many ways, the infant God can be disregarded?
In fact, the more I think about it, the more impossible it seems to actually fear, love and trust in Him above all things!
And yet, unless and until I do, I am lost completely and utterly.
God help Me to have no other God's before You.
And do you know what? That is a prayer that God always hears and answers.
By His almighty power and boundless pity, He comes to you to save you.
He gives you this impossible saving faith by sending you the infant God.
He causes you to believe the impossible by unleashing all of His divine power and might through these very human words.
The problem is not overcome by God changing the way He does things in order to fit with your human reason.
Rather, this newborn God simply is who He is and continues to do what He does.
And what He does is save you. For that is His name, after-all.
You will call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. AMEN.

Christmas Eve - December 24 Midnight

Hymn of Invocation: 384 "Of the Father's Love Begotten" (solo on verse #1?)

Introit

Old Testament: Isaiah 9:2-7

Sequence Hymn: 412 "The People That in Darkness Sat"

Epistle: Titus 2:11-14

Gradual Hymn: 379 "O Come, All Ye Faithful" st. 1-2

Gospel: Luke 2:1-14

Nicene Creed

Hymn of the Day: 358 "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come" (how many stanzas?

(1-6?) alt. stz

Sermon

Distribution Hymn: 383 "A Great and Mighty Wonder"

Hymn to Depart: 363 "Silent Night"