

In Nomine Iesu
Advent Vespers 3
Behold a greater One than the Temple, place of priestly atonement
Matthew 12:1-8

“At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!’ But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet, I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice,” you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who destroyed the temple and in three days raised it up again. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

The Temple of God was born on the day we’ve come to call Christmas 2000 years ago in the little town of Bethlehem. Now this may sound strange. Temples are built, not born. Moses built the Tabernacle, which means tent, as a portable temple of God, to enclose the ark of the covenant above which hovered the column of fire and cloud that led Israel out of slavery and into the promised land. Solomon later built a temple of stone to enclose the ark of God. And although Solomon's Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, it was replaced by another one, poorer and smaller to be sure, built when Israel returned from captivity. That temple was in turn completely rebuilt by King Herod. It took 46 years to do so, as Jewish leaders pointed out to Jesus the day they scoffed at His assurance that He would destroy “this temple” and in three days raise it up again. (John 2:20) The tabernacle and both temples that followed were fashioned by human hands according to divine design. In them, at least at first, dwelt the presence of the Lord in cloud and fire. But the Temple of God born in the City of David was not made with human hands.

At the moment of Jesus’ conception within the virgin by the Holy Spirit, the divine and human natures were united in one Person, never to be separated again, as we confess in the creeds. He who is, as we confess in the Nicene Creed, “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,” grew within her who was chosen by God until, nine months later, the Temple of God was born. This Temple’s name is Jesus. In Him the fullness of God dwelt bodily, as Paul said. (Colossians 2:9) Bethlehem’s Babe is God in the flesh, He is Emmanuel, which, translated, means “God with us.”

This same Jesus, when He had increased “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men,” was baptized by John at the Jordan River, and there identified for all Israel as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” From there He began to teach the people who gathered around Him. And from them He chose

twelve men to be His constant companions and closest disciples. Together they went throughout all of Palestine, as the Romans called their province: Galilee, the region beyond the Jordan, Samaria and then also Judea, the land of the ancient capital, Jerusalem.

On one such journey through Palestine, Jesus and His disciples traveled through a grain field. As they walked they were gathering the ripened grain that grew along the road, something customarily allowed to travelers. It was not this that drew the attention and wrath of some who also followed after and watched them. No, it was that they did this on the Sabbath. In answering their accusation, Jesus gave the example of David, who entered the tabernacle of the Lord and took the bread of the presence from the Holy Place, which was to be for the priests alone, to feed His men, something God's word did not condemn. Then He pointed out that the priests of the temple of God themselves worked on the Sabbath, yet without sin, saying, "Have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet, I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple."

After that He quoted the prophet Hosea, "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Dear friends, consider what Jesus said in these few verses. He laid claim to the royal privileges of David, the priestly rights of the temple, and the prophetic authority of Hosea. He made the incredible statement that "One greater than the temple" is here. On what basis does He do so? On this basis: "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Do you see what He is saying? He is King, Priest, and Prophet all in One. Such a One could only be the One who was to come and redeem the seed of the woman, the One who would be a "like" Moses, (Deuteronomy 18:15) who ruled, interceded for, and proclaimed God's word to, Israel. Jesus, in other words, is the One Moses said would come and redeem Israel. He is the Messiah. He is the One who would bring God's Sabbath peace into the hearts and minds of sinful man.

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Jesus, as a name, means, "He will save." That's what God promised mankind He would do in and through His eternal Son, who would be born of a woman, born under the law. This is what He who is very God of very God came to do. He came to be tempted as we are, yet without sin, to fulfill all that God's commandments require of us. He came to bear all our sins in His own holy and sinless body, and then carry them all, from smallest to greatest, to Calvary, and there make payment to God for all our sin and evil, there make the one sacrifice for all sin forever. In other words, this One **greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon, greater than God's temple** itself, was born on Christmas to suffer and die for the sins of the world in order to redeem all from sin, death and hell. And having done all that, He would rise again on the third day in proof that His sacrifice was complete and all atoning, for He Himself said: "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it again." (John 2:19) Yes, Jesus the Christ is the Greater One. This is He whose birth we celebrate once more at Christmas. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria