

DECEMBER 18, 2016

ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

Matthew 1: 1-25

“ONE BABY----THREE NAMES”

Have you ever had a time when you tried and tried to succeed at something, but it just wouldn't happen? Well, back in 1968, Gov. George Romney (Mitt's father) was running to get the Republican nomination for president. And he had a day like that. George Romney, former president of American Motors and governor of Michigan, had the reputation of being aloof and maybe looking down some on “common people”. During the campaigning leading up to the New Hampshire primary his campaign managers really wanted to defeat that notion about Romney. So they arranged for him to visit a bowling alley so as to mix with “common folk”. Romney said he had never bowled. They said, “Don't worry, you don't need to bowl. Just mix with the folks and do a little casual campaigning.”

So off to the bowling alley they went and the governor shook hands, ate a little from the alley's cafeteria, kissed a few babies..... All was going well and then the governor had a sudden inspiration and said he wanted to bowl a frame. The advisors tried to quietly talk him out of it as he knew nothing about bowling. But he insisted—so the crowd, the reporters, the photographers all gathered around to watch him bowl. His first ball was in the gutter. So was the second. Then he managed to pick off one pin. At this point, his advisors tried hard to convince him it was time to move on..... But Romney had a stubborn streak and it right now kicked in big time. He decided he was going to knock down all 10 pins no matter what. And so, to the horror of his advisors, and to the amusement of the crowd and the press, he just kept on and on and on..... Well, he finally knocked down all 10 pins, but it took 34 throws to do it!

He lost the primary. In fact, he actually dropped out before voting day. Maybe it wasn't the turning point, but his bowling alley experience was thought by many to have certainly not helped him any. (White Knight, Jules Witcover, Random House, 1972, p. 190)

Well, we've all had times like that when nothing works out, no matter how hard we try. The whole world has often been like that-----striving for peace, for unity; over and over again, but always failing.

But one day God intervened in our world. And that is the central message of Christmas. One day God intervened. He sent His Son to help us and save us. He's not all done yet, but it all will work out!

The Lord came quietly at that first Christmas. But it was a very big deal, indeed! And to show us how important His birth was, today's gospel lesson from Matthew 1 gives all the names of the ancestors of Jesus Christ going back to Abraham. You just heard the long list---lots and lots and lots of names. Some famous, some obscure. Lots and lots of names. But we'll just look at 3 names given in Matthew 1 today...just the 3 names that our gospel reading gives for the Son of God who came at Christmas. Those 3 names are “Christ”, “Emmanuel”, and “Jesus”. Let's look at them one by one.

First, the name “**Christ**”. It’s actually a title, not a personal name. “Christ” comes from the Greek form of the title. In Hebrew, it’s “Messiah”. We usually use “Christ” in English, but the English meaning is “the anointed one”.

So the Son of God is the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one. He was anointed for a mission. He was sent on that mission. From where was He sent and to where was He sent? He was sent from heaven to earth. He was sent to us. The “anointed one”, the “sent one” was sent to us from heaven above.

Moving on to the second name for the Lord in today’s gospel reading..... Who or what is this “Christ”, this “anointed one”, this “sent one”? Who was sent? We find out from the second name. It’s not actually a personal name either, but a title. St. Matthew gives it to us in verse 23, quoting from what was written by the Holy Prophet Isaiah hundreds of years earlier---“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel.” **Emmanuel**—that is who the Christ is. Now I’ll read verse 23 again, but with its full ending---“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel, which means ‘God with us’”.

“Emmanuel”, “God with us”. That is who the Christ, the sent one is—He is God. God with us. God came to our world as a human being to be with us.

Was that baby born at Christmas a human baby? Yes, totally so. And that baby was also divine. He is Emmanuel, God with us. When that baby cried, it was God crying. When that baby got a little older and laughed, it was God laughing.

Before that first Christmas, the world didn’t know that much about what God was like. But since that baby came, we know what He is like. God is like Jesus, because Jesus is God. He is “Emmanuel”—God with us.

We pray the service of Great Compline on Monday nights during Lent in the spring. Early on in that service, there are quite a few Old Testament verses that are chanted. And in between those verses, we sing a simple refrain---“God is with us”. Over and over, we sing what Emmanuel means---“God is with us”. I counted---we sing it 25 times (and then a few more times later in the service). How comforting each Monday night in Lent, as we go through spiritual struggle and stress, as we strive to use that special season to repent of our sins and grow in the Lord... In the midst of that struggle, we are reminded every Monday—God is with us.

And, of course, He is with us not only in Lent but all the time. Because Jesus is Emmanuel, that means God is with us. And so now we know what Almighty God is like.....and He is very, very good!

A little boy and his mother were out for a walk on a beautiful day with a pretty blue sky with a couple of big white clouds overhead. The little boy pointed up and asked, “Is God up there?” The mother replied, “Well, God is everywhere.....but, yes, God is up there.” The boy stared at the sky a bit and said, “I can’t see Him. He must be hiding behind that big cloud.” He thought a little and then said, “I sure wish God would stick His head out from behind that cloud so I could get a peek at Him!” (in “Our Daily Bread”, 12/20/91)

At the first Christmas, God *did* stick His head out. He actually did a lot better than that. He came down to earth so we could get a real good look at Him. He came here in Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us. And so now we really know what God is like.

Which leads us to the third name given to our Lord in today’s gospel reading--- Why was Christ, “the sent one”, sent? Why did Emmanuel, “God with us”, come to be

with us?

The third name tells us. It is the Christ's own personal name, what people called Him on a daily basis---the name is **Jesus**. The angel told St. Joseph, in verse 21 of today's gospel lesson, to name Him that---"You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." The meaning of the name "Jesus" is there given to us. The meaning is "God saves".

To save us---that was why the "sent one" was sent. That was Emmanuel's mission. The mission was to live out His personal name of Jesus, which means "God saves". He came to save us.

That was not an easy mission. It meant lots of suffering and rejection for Him. And it led to a cross. But He completed His mission and He saved us from sin, death, and hell. He gave us forgiveness and eternal life.

The name "Jesus" means "God saves". And God did save us through Jesus.

And so the Lord's personal name, Jesus, has become the greatest name ever. St. Paul describes its greatness in Philippians 2: 9-11---"Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

St. Paul is saying here that at the end, when Jesus returns, every knee will bow to His name. Some will bow voluntarily and in love, some will bow involuntarily and in fear. Don't wait until that day. Bow your knee to Him now every day by worshipping Him as God. Center your whole life around that most beautiful man with the most beautiful name---Jesus.

Today's gospel reading is all about names. Hard to pronounce names. Too many names to remember. But do remember three of those names, the 3 names for the One whose birthday we are about to celebrate.

Those 3 names---

---Christ, the anointed one, the sent one.

---Emmanuel, God with us. God come to us as a baby boy....

---Jesus, the one who saves us. That beautiful name, at which every knee will bow.....

Let us worship Him every day. And let us worship Him this morning as we now go ahead to offer up the holy oblation of His Body and Blood.

