

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Heavenly Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Man-Made Temples failed]

Brothers and Sisters, Merry Christmas!

“The Savior is born!” “The Messiah has come!” “The Redeemer lives!”

Those phrases are common this time of year.

We are now 2,000 years removed from when they were first made true. (Give or take.)

And they are absolutely worthy of our contemplation.

For thousands of years, humanity had been under the yoke of sin.

As we heard earlier, God promised our first parents that he would send a Redeemer.

And this promise—this covenant—would continually be reaffirmed by his prophets.

Yes! God’s people clung to that hope even when...

They were taken as slaves in Egypt.

God led them out of Egypt,

and had an ‘Ark of the Covenant’ built so they would remember his covenant with them.

He even had them build a special tent, the Tabernacle, to house the Ark.

Then God’s people were invaded by Philistines, who stole the Ark (for a time).

God had the Ark returned.

In time, he had his people build a sturdier Temple to house it.

Then they were defeated by the Assyrians, followed almost immediately by the Babylonians, who captured the Ark, losing it to history, and destroying the First Temple.

God freed his people, and a Second Temple was built to remind them of his promise.

Then came a parade of conquerors, each *demanding* worship:

Alexander the Great,

The Ptolomies,

And worst of all: the Romans, who would defile the Temple!

Sure, there were brief periods of freedom and rebellion,

A few years when Rome gave them *some* autonomy.

A few times when the Temple was cleansed

and worship and sacrifices could be offered for the forgiveness of sins...

But things were never quite the same.

Man-made Temples continued to fall.

Nonetheless, prophets continued to reaffirm God’s promise: a Redeemer would come.

[The God-made Temple completes!]

Then everything changed.

Christmas happened!

The Redeemer who had been prophesied about for thousands of years had finally come!

“The Savior is born!” “The Messiah has come!” “The Redeemer lives!”

And the magnitude of this development was greater
than any Old Testament prophet could fully grasp.

Indeed, it’s more than *we* can grasp!

The omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, incomprehensible, infinite God
had taken on completely normal human flesh.

He Himself became the Savior, the Messiah, the Redeemer!

There would be no more need for a Temple, or sacrifices to forgive sins...

For He himself would be the Sacrifice, and He himself the Temple.

Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (John 2:19)

Jesus willingly gave Himself on the Cross for our sins.

Because no Temple built by human hands,

No sacrifice offered by human hands,

No good works done by human hands

Could ever free us from that yoke of slavery to sin.

We are sinners. We set up false temples to our false gods, and such temples will always fail.
But that “God-made Temple” —Jesus Christ— will never fail.

This is what we celebrate at Christmas:

The fulfillment of thousands of years of promises,
when God came to earth to redeem his people.

“The Savior is born!” “The Messiah has come!” “The Redeemer lives!”

[Come, and worship!]

God now invites us to “Come, and worship!”

And he calls us to worship, not with the fanfare or power of those worldly conquerors,

But in the guise of a little baby, lying in a manger.

He comes in a way that we can approach him, know him.

After all, to whom was this baby’s birth announced?

Not the great Caesar or other powerful worldly rulers—
but to lowly shepherds, lying with their flocks.

God had come to them, in a way that they might understand His love.

And how did the shepherds respond?

“They *returned*, glorifying and praising God

for all the things that they had heard and seen,
as it was told unto them.”

“The Savior is born!” “The Messiah has come!” “The Redeemer lives!”

[He comes to live in us—living Temples!]

Brothers and sisters, our Redeemer continues to come to us
in ways that we might know his love.

Through Holy Baptism,
our Redeemer comes to make His dwelling not just with us, but *in* us.
You are now His Temple!
And as you know, a God-made Temple cannot fail.
You are His forever.
You.
You, in your body, are where worship of him now happens.
You are living Temples to the Lord!

We come to church on Christmas and Easter and Sundays and sometimes Wednesdays
(maybe even Saturdays), and we come to worship Him, yes.
This is good—it is here that we are refreshed and strengthened by His gifts.
But this is not where the worship of Him *stops*.

If your body is His Temple—a living Temple—
then your worship of Him continues in your actions!

That generous ‘Christmas Spirit’ isn’t to leave you when you walk out these doors!
You are to love our neighbor in the same way your Redeemer did,
Offering your bodies as living Temples to Him.

The shepherds
“...*returned*, glorifying and praising God
for all the things that they had heard and seen,
as it was told unto them.”

Be like the shepherds.
Come, and worship him with all you have—with your bodies as living Temples to Him!
In all your interactions with others, let your actions say:
“The Savior is born!” “The Messiah has come!” “The Redeemer lives!”

**Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**
