

# The Anglican Tradition

A Journal of Theology and Devotion

## Celebrating Advent & Christmas

*All mountains of pride and self-will must be cast down; the valleys of neglected duties filled up; the crooked places of our deceitful hearts made straight; and the rough places of our uneven tempers made smooth—that the King may come, and that we may see the salvation of God.*

—A. C. A. Hall

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### SPECIAL CHRISTMAS ISSUE



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*The Rev. Dr. S. Randall Toms*

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### A Morning Prayer for the Advent Season

*Rev. Harry Crosswell*

*A ministry of St. Paul's Reformed Episcopal Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana*

# Our Publisher



## St. Paul's Church



St. Paul's Reformed Episcopal Church in Baton Rouge, LA is a member of the Reformed Episcopal Church in the United States. Amid growing concerns that the Protestant Episcopal Church was departing from some of the foundational principles of the English Reformation, a group led by The Rt. Rev'd George David Cummins, D.D., a duly consecrated bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church, formed this new denomination (though not a new church) in New York City on December 2, 1873. The Reformed Episcopal Church has maintained a continuous existence for over 130 years during which it has maintained Biblical orthodoxy while upholding both Evangelical Truth and Apostolic Order. For more information concerning the history and mission of the REC, visit [www.recus.org](http://www.recus.org).

*The mission of St. Paul's Church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, to reverently worship God and to love others as God loved us. We do this through Scriptural preaching and Sacramental worship in the tradition of the English Reformation and the use of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer.*

*St. Paul's strives to balance the beauty of a high, liturgical reverential worship with expository preaching and a vibrant congregational life. Our other ministries include weekly Holy Communion services, men's fellowships and Bible studies, altar and acolyte ministries, women's fellowship, fellowships for our children, Morning Prayer, congregational breakfasts, book publishing and pastoral services. If you are in the Baton Rouge area, come visit us. Please visit our website at [www.stpaulsbr.org](http://www.stpaulsbr.org)*

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## OUR VISION

*The vision of 'The Anglican Tradition' is to revive an interest in true churchmanship, promote the historic Anglican faith, its biblical heritage, traditions, and long-forgotten, out of print, literature.*

## Special Thanks/Credits

- Thanks to Mr. Harold Birkett, from our church congregation, for the picture of our altar on the front cover.
- Thanks to the vestry, families and individuals at St. Paul's REC, who have joyously and enthusiastically supported this ministry, participated in its growth, and contributed with talents and gifts to its creation.
- Pictures – Front Cover: Ely Cathedral, Ely, Norfolk, England. Back cover: Ruins of St. John's, from the Grosvenor Park, Chester, Cheshire, England.



# Celebrating Christ's Coming in Christmas



Though we often hear the lyrics, “*It’s the most wonderful time of the year*,” the Christmas season is often filled with stress, frustration, and disappointment. The experts tell us that for those

who battle depression, the Christmas season is the most difficult of all to get through without having major attacks of deep sadness.

Some psychologists say that people build such high expectations for this time of year that the reality of the experience can never live up to what was anticipated. After all the presents have been opened, all the delicacies eaten, and all the friends and family have gone, one is often left with the expression of Ecclesiastes, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

**T**his feeling of emptiness is inevitable because we think that the happiness of the season comes from all the gifts and tinsel. While the gifts and decorations can add to our enjoyment of this season, they can never provide us the lasting joy of this time year. If Christ is not the source of our joy and the center of our celebrations, a letdown is inevitable.

**This issue of *The Anglican Tradition* is designed to help us celebrate the season in such a way that our primary focus is on Jesus Christ and his coming.**

After the shepherds saw the Christ child, they ‘returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen’ (Luke 2:20).

**T**he people of God had been anticipating the coming of our Lord for centuries. For his people, who have experienced the forgiveness of sins and the joy of communion with God, the reality of his coming was even greater than the expectation.

We pray that this issue of *The Anglican Tradition* will help you to experience a spiritual joy that is based on the coming of Christ, a joy far exceeds what you may have anticipated.

Father Toms  
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The Rev. Dr. S. Randall Toms is the Vicar of St. Paul's Reformed Episcopal Church. With over 30 years of pastoral experience, he has served several congregations in Louisiana. He holds a B. A. from Louisiana Tech University, a Master of Divinity from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in English from Louisiana State University. His doctoral dissertation, *Ambivalent Idylls*, compared the novels of Ellen Glasgow, William Faulkner, and Thomas Hardy. He and his wife, Bettyna, have one daughter, Rebekah, and two grandchildren, Rachel and Bobby.

# The Word Made Flesh

A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. S. Randall Toms  
Vicar of St. Paul's Reformed Episcopal Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

The other night, there was a television special entitled, “The mystery of Christmas.” It attempted to answer the question about what really happened on that first Christmas night so long ago. Over the years, what happened has become obscured. Many people know that Christ was born on Christmas, but they really don’t have much idea about why he came. They think it has something to with bringing peace on earth and good will toward men. They think that Christ was born to teach us a better way to live. But the real meaning and depth of the Christmas story has been lost on us over the years.



Our collect for today sums up the meaning of Christmas pretty well: “Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him.” There we find in a nutshell what happened at Christmas. God gave his only begotten Son to take our nature upon him. We must remember that Christ had existed long before he was born in Bethlehem. He has existed from all eternity. Our Lord had no beginning and no end. As we confess each Sunday in the Nicene Creed, “I believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God; Begotten, not made.” Jesus Christ is God. He is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. He had no beginning. He was eternally begotten, so there is no moment in time or before time that you can say, “This is when Christ came into being.” He is eternal even as His father is eternal. From all eternity past, Jesus and God the Father enjoyed unbroken, happy fellowship with one another.

But when man sinned against God, man needed someone to save him from his sins, so God sent his only Son into the world to save us. The only way he could save us was by taking upon himself our nature. Since man had broken the law and deserved the wrath of almighty God, a man had to take our place and bear the wrath of God for us. So God, out of his great love for us, sent his only son into the world to take our nature, so that he could be our substitute. As a man, he kept the law for us, so that he could give us his perfect righteousness. All of us have broken his law, but Jesus kept the law in our place. Now, if we believe on Jesus, God looks upon us as though we have kept the law perfectly. Christ took our nature upon him so that he could bear the wrath of God for our sins. On the cross, he took

the penalty that we deserved. For this reason, he took our nature upon himself. Man sinned, so man must die, and Christ became man to die in our place.

## What Shall We Then Say?

Think for a moment how much God have loved us to give us his only Son. Could you have done it? Think of your children. Could you give up your children so that others could live? Could you stand by and allow your children to be mocked, scourged, spit upon, and crucified? Yet that is what God did for us. As St. Paul said, “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:31-2). God loves us so much that he did not spare his own Son. When he sent him into the world to take our nature, he knew what taking our nature would mean. It would mean feeling the pain and agony of the cross, but that is why our Lord became man.

Why did God give us His son and not spare his Son? He gave him to us so that we could become the children of God. Our collect for today reads, “Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace.” We are the children of God by adoption. We are not God’s children by nature, because we are born sinners. We have to be adopted into God’s family. In Galatians 4:4-5, St. Paul wrote, “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” God sent his son into the world: that we might be adopted into the family of God. Think of that! Though we are rebel sinners who

have so many times lifted our fists in defiance of God, God wanted us to be his children, so he sent his son to die for us so that we might be adopted into the family of God. What grace! As our Collect says, we are made God's children by adoption and grace. Grace is God's unmerited favor. We did not deserve the love of God. We did not deserve to be made his children. We deserved exactly the opposite, but God loved us though we were sinners, though we were his enemies. Grace is God's love shown to the undeserving, and it is by that grace that we are adopted into his family.

## The Great Miracle of Christmas

The great miracle of Christmas is that God took upon himself our nature in the person of Jesus Christ and was made man. We call that event "the incarnation"—the doctrine that God became man. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. But there is another miracle that occurs because Christ became man, and that is that this same Christ can come now to live in us. Our collect says,

*"Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit."*

We may wonder how the writers of the collect suddenly switched gears and started talking about our own regeneration. In the old Sarum Missal, written before the time of the Reformation, the collect for today began,

*"Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the new birth of thy only-begotten Son through the flesh may set free those, who are held fast by the old bondage under the yoke of sin."*

It is strange that this collect spoke of the "new birth of thy only-begotten Son." What new birth were they talking about? This is certainly not a new birth from a state of sin to a state of righteousness. No this collect was referring to our Lord's new birth as a man. He was eternally begotten of his Father before all worlds, but he was born again at Bethlehem when he took upon himself our nature. Christ was born again as man that we might be born again in a spiritual sense. He was born again as man that we might be born again as the children of God.

## The New Birth

So, if Christ was born again at Bethlehem, when are we born again? We were regenerated, born again at the time of our baptism. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Christians have been born of water and the Spirit. When

we were baptized, we were born of water and the Holy Spirit was given to us. In our service of Holy Baptism, after I baptize someone, I am instructed by the prayer book to say, "Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this Child, (this person), is regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ's church..." We are born again, regenerated by the Holy Spirit at the time of our baptism.

But that baptism, that regeneration, is merely the beginning of the Christian life. As our collect says, "Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit." We were renewed by the Holy Spirit at baptism, but that renewing doesn't stop there. We must daily be renewed by the Holy Spirit.

## Every Child Should be a Saint

God's plan for his children who are born in his church is that they might never know a time when they do not love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. After all, they are given the Holy Spirit at the time of their baptism, so a godly child should be the norm. But alas, we often grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Sometimes, this grieving is due to parents not training their children as they should by the word of God and by bringing them to the sacrament of Communion. Every little child should be a saint, and could be, if we trained them properly. If they are not, it may be because we are not teaching them to use the means of grace whereby the Holy Spirit renews them day by day.

If we pray earnestly with them every day, if we teach them the Holy Scriptures every day, if we love them and nurture them every day, then the Holy Spirit will continually renew them day by day. Sadly, it happens often, in both children and in adults, that we grieve the Holy Spirit, and this work of daily renewal is not carried on day by day. As Edward Goulburgh writes,

*"Too often the vital spark communicated in Baptism is overlaid and smothered by neglect of religious education on the part of parents, and by frivolities and follies and youthful lusts on the part of the baptized. In that case the spark which has been, it may be, latent and never quite extinct, must be made to burst forth vividly and brilliantly from the embers of worldliness and sensuality, under which it has long smouldered."*

As we look back on our lives, we often see that it has been the case that the "vital spark" that was given to us at baptism has been smothered by neglect. Sometimes, this smothering is due to the neglect of the parents. As we get older and must take responsibility for our own spiritual growth, that vital spark given to us in baptism is smothered by the "frivolities and follies and youthful lusts."

It is a sad thing today to look at so many of our young people and see that they have no heart for God, and the reason is that they are captivated by the trivial things of this life, and that spark that was given to them in baptism has been smothered. Even in our adult years, we quench the Holy Spirit, we grieve the Holy Spirit, and we resist the Holy Spirit by our sins and by our negligence in using the means of grace.

To quote Goulburgh again, "And since, in all healthy spiritual growth, the process of renewal goes on daily, it might be at bed-time a suitable question for self-examination whether, during the day past, our inward man has been renewed; whether this day we have received and digested the heavenly manna of God's Word; whether we have practised real prayer, the one exercise of the spiritual life; and whether we have breathed, or even sought to breathe, the free fresh atmosphere of communion with God."

As I have preached this sermon, you may have wondered why we are so concerned with our regeneration on Christmas Day. Why are we so concerned about being renewed day by day? For this reason: just as Christ was born 2,000 years, he can be born in us now. As we sing in "O Little Town of Bethlehem:"

*O Holy Child of Bethlehem!  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin and enter in,  
Be born in us today.*

This is a great truth we need to be reminded of at Christmas. Christ was born at Bethlehem, but we want him to be born in us today. The Holy Spirit does in his renewing work day by day. He comes and transforms us into the image of Christ. As St. Paul put it,

*"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."*

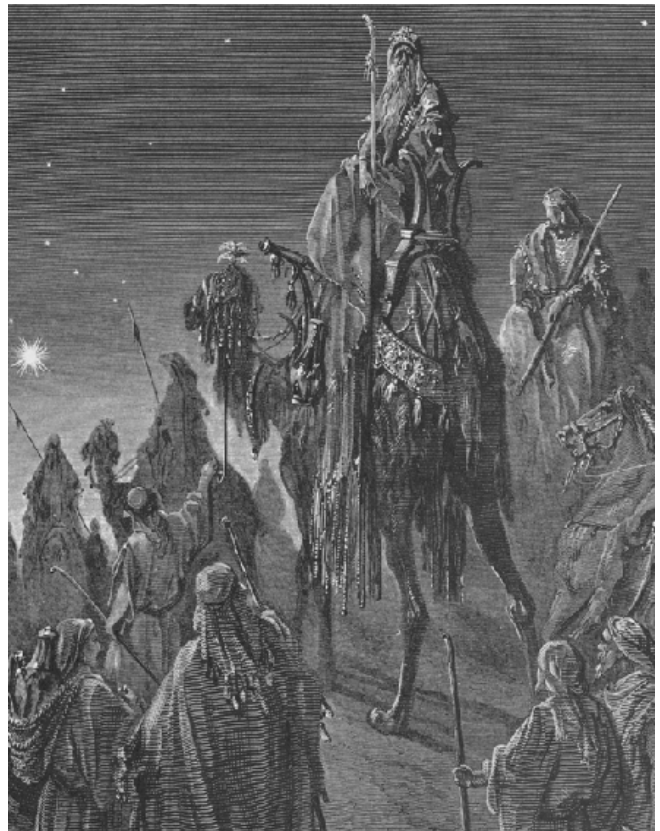
God's eternal plan and purpose is to make us like Christ, to bear his image. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

*"But we all, with open face beholding, as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18).*

In that verse you see the work of the Holy Spirit once again, changing us, transforming us so that we might bear the image of Jesus Christ. Christ was born so that we could be born again and look just like Jesus.

## Let Us Ask Ourselves

On this Christmas day, as we remember how Jesus was born in Bethlehem, let us ask ourselves the question, Has Christ been born in me? Do I live like Jesus, talk like Jesus, and act like Jesus? Am I allowing the Holy Spirit to renew me day by day so that each and every day, I am conformed more to the image of Christ? St. John said, "As he is, so are we in the world." We are representatives of Christ in this world who bear his image. He was born so that he could be born many times in the lives of his followers. Has Christ been born in us? Amen.



**The Wise Men Guided by the Star**

*"And lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was..." (Matt. 2:9)*

*As those who rejected or neglected the Baptist's preparatory mission were unprepared to welcome Christ when He came in the flesh, so will it be with His coming in glory; only those who have been trained by penitence and purification, by the teaching and the ministrations of the Christian Church, will be ready to welcome Him and to rejoice at His manifestation.*

*(A. C. A. Hall)*