

Friday, December 24, 2010
Nativity of Our Lord (I), Christmas Eve
10 pm

Isaiah 9:2–7
Psalm 96
Titus 2:11–14
Luke 2:1–14 [15–20]

I.N.I.

Hodie Christus Natus est. Today Christ is born.

The straw and the manger become a throne. The cow and the donkey host us. Shepherds become the luminaries who receive the announcement of good news of great joy. “To you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” Today.

I just couldn’t wait for Christmas Day as a kid. It was a day for the family to share love and joy like no other. There were symbols of that love and joy in gifts under the tree, yet to be revealed in wrapping paper, an equal amount between the three children. My parents had a rule: no one could get up before 7 am. So I tossed and turned, waiting for the hour hand of the clock to turn, slowly, oh so slowly, until at 6:55 am, I would watch and stare at the second hand tick-tocking, and the minute hand inching its way to the appointed hour. Hooray! It’s Christmas!

Don’t wait. Jesus is born. Don’t toss and turn tonight. Instead, rejoice, be merry, the light of God has come.

This light, coming into the world at its darkest most time, fills the cracks of closed doors, shines on those who would snuff out illumination, beams down on those huddled in fear.

The story told by Luke about Jesus’ origins is that the *pax domini* the peace of God subverted the *pax Romana*, the peace of Rome.

Behind the façade of big ruler Augustus and his lieutenant Quirinius appearing to be orderly and in control. a little child descended from David’s line appears.

Mary and Joseph can’t even huddle with others who have made the trip to be counted, but find a cave.

While the bean counters prepare their machinations and people still suffer, Glory lights up the sky! While undocumented shepherds work the night shift, in the dark, the message is given: *Hodie Christus Natus est.* Today Christ is born.

Glory way way up! Peace all the way down. Pax domini, the peace of God envelops the cosmos.

The story is told by Luke about Jesus is that he brought about something new, breaking the mold,

toppling the mighty, and going out of his way to include those on the edges.

Returning to his hometown synagogue Jesus proclaims Jubilee, where debts are forgiven, sight is restored, God's favor returns. After reading the prophecy from Isaiah, young upstart concludes *Hodie Today* the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

On his way to Jerusalem Jesus teaches subversion through the way of the cross. In Jericho a screwed-up tax collector named Zacchaeus climbs a tree, Jesus calls him down, and sets him on a new path. Jesus announces *Hodie Today* salvation has come to your house.

Near the end of his life, while on the tree destined to do away with him, Jesus receives the plea of a no good rotten thief to be remembered when he comes into his kingdom and answers *Hodie Today* you will be with me in Paradise.

Hodie Christus Natus est. Today Christ is born.

Open the doors of your heart. Break open whatever keeps you from the light of God, and receive grace upon grace with arm wide open, breathe in peace deeply, sing lustily to wake the dawn.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was put into prison during the pax Adolpho, but his faith in pax domini brought light and shed light during Christmas of 1943. Bonhoeffer had a career in teaching laid out for him in the states after studying at Union Seminary in New York. He chose to return to a dark time in Germany and subverted the totalitarian regime of Nazism through an underground seminary, in writing that continues to sparkle in the 21st century, and in a life that witnesses to the ways that Christ comes down, comes down to find those in all sorts of prisons, in all sorts of dire straits, comes down to release us from fear and dread.

In a letter to his parents on December 17, 1943 Dietrich fetchingly writes

For a Christian there is nothing peculiarly difficult about Christmas in a prison cell. I daresay it will have more meaning and will be observed with greater sincerity here in this prison than in places where all that survives of the feast is its name. That misery, suffering, poverty, loneliness, helplessness, and guilt look very different to the eyes of God from what they do to [humans], that God should come down to the very place which [people] usually abhor, that Christ was born in a stable because there was no room for him in the inn—these are things which a prisoner can understand better than anyone else. For the prisoner the Christmas story is glad tidings in a very real sense. And that faith gives the prisoner a part in the communion of saints, a fellowship transcending the bounds of time and space and reducing the months of confinement here to insignificance.

--quoted in *Christmas Sourcebook* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications) p. 10.

Join in the song of the angels, the exuberance of the shepherds, the reflectiveness of Mary, and the light of God come down to earth. Make room for Christ who breaks through and announces that in him, all things are new. Make a cradle for him in hands that receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation, God in Christ converting us to the pax domini, the peace of God that shatters all that oppresses and threatens and brings us into the courts of heavenly joy here, now,

today,
Hodie Christus natus est. Today Christ is born.

Hooray! It's Christmas!

I.N.I.