

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The world has moved on and is thinking of their New Year's revelry, but not the church. We're still in the Christmas season—it's only the 5th day of Christmas. We're still celebrating. We're still singing. We're still thinking about incarnation. We're still thinking about the Holy Child Jesus, born of the Virgin, cared for by the Holy Family. We prayed today, "O God, ... in the incarnation of Your Son [You] yet more wondrously restored our human nature. Grant that we may ever be alive in Him who made Himself to be like us."

This Holy Child was indeed made to be like us — God's Son from eternity, He became flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary. Laying aside His Divine glory and the use of His Divine power, He was born in low estate as a weak and helpless infant. The writer to the Hebrews acknowledges this truth powerfully. He writes, "[s]ince ... the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things" And again, "he had to be made like his brothers in every respect". And all this so that "through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil" so that, He could help "the offspring of Abraham" (Heb. 2:14-17).

But more than being born an infant lowly and weak, He was born into a world filled with dangers, with enemies arrayed against Him. You recall that Luther identifies the enemies that assail us: the devil, the world, and our sinful nature. These enemies do not want us to hallow God's name; they want to keep God's kingdom far from us. The devil, the world, and our sinful nature want to deceive us and mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

Now, you might think that since Jesus was made to be like us, these same enemies all would have assailed Him, too. Not quite. That's so, except for the "sinful nature." You know that Jesus was not born with the corruption of sin, nor did He sin. Thus, the writer to the Hebrews again would say, that Jesus was "*in every respect ... tempted as we are, yet without sin*" (Heb. 4:15). That's how Jesus' blood could be a sufficient ransom price for us—because He was a perfect sacrifice, a "*lamb without blemish or spot*" (1 Pet. 1:19).

It's important to know that the lack of sin does not make Jesus any less human. To be sure, we are conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity (Ps. 51:5), but sin is not an essential part of humanity. It is a corruption of that humanity and the state of sinlessness with which it was originally created. After the fall into sin, though, we are born sinful and cannot help but sin. Nevertheless, human nature and our sinful nature are distinguished. In the Formula of Concord, we "confess that there is a distinction between man's nature and original sin" (FC, Epitome, I:2).

Therefore, Christ, who was sinless, did not have to contend with a sinful nature in Himself. He did, however, have to contend with the other archenemies of man: the devil and the world. Christ, we'll hear again as we enter the season of Lent, was tempted sorely by the devil, and yet remained sinless. But today, we hear how man's enemy, the world, sought to destroy the child Jesus. Jesus' life was in mortal danger.

The wise men had departed from offering their gifts to Jesus, and did not honor Herod's request to report back what they had found. God had warned them in a dream that Herod was being false. He didn't really want to worship the child king; he wanted to kill him. Joseph, too, was warned in a dream to flee their home and take refuge in Egypt because Herod was coming after the Christ child to destroy Him.

Joseph obeyed and, with the child and His mother Mary, traveled to Egypt and lived there for a while, safe from Herod's fury. And Matthew tells us that this act begins the fulfillment of what Israel's deliverance out of Egypt centuries before foreshadowed. Jesus went down to Egypt as the embodiment of the nation of Israel, kept safe there as Israel had been in days past, called out of Egypt, not just to deliver Israel out of slavery, but to accomplish the salvation of the whole world. "*Out of Egypt I called my son.*"

Jesus would not be thwarted in His mission to save us "*from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us*" (Luke 1:71). Rather, God thwarted His enemy. Herod sought to destroy the Christ child, but failed as Jesus escaped to Egypt. Nevertheless, Herod's fury was meted out upon little innocent boys in Bethlehem, unintended casualties of war. There are always casualties in war.

Rachel weeps for them, as she, no doubt, does for the casualties still today, like the millions of innocents killed in the scourge of abortion. Proponents of abortion once claimed they wanted it to be rare, but that lie has been unmasked. So now, they call on their followers to shout their abortions. Make no mistake. This is an attack on the Author of Life; it's an attack on Christianity. It is idolatry. To be sure, many women regret their abortions, and turning to the Lord, they are forgiven. But many others, drunk with the power of holding life or death in their hands, feel like they're gods themselves. We call them to repentance!

There are still casualties today, like the thousands killed, kidnapped, and tortured around the world. Christianity remains the most persecuted religion around the world. Just two days ago, Muslim militants killed eleven Christians in Nigeria. We pray for these and other Christians around the world suffering the world's rage. It is a dangerous enemy.

Even in the U. S., Christians are targeted for the faith and for not compromising on truth. Christians may not be as often killed, but if you're a Christian judge nominated for a position on the Supreme Court, and we think you'll not support abortion, we'll destroy you and your family. Or if you're a Christian baker, florist, photographer, funeral home director, or T-shirt maker seeking to honor the Lord, the world unapologetically says, "we will destroy you."

Truly, we are a church militant doing battle against our enemies, including the world. The world continues to seek the destruction of the followers of Jesus. The world hates us because of Jesus (John 15:18), because we abide in Jesus' word (John 8:31) and will not compromise the truth. This is our sword in battle: the Word of God, while the world wields a steel sword against us. Nevertheless, we know our two-edged sword is ultimately stronger, and Jesus exhorts us not to "*fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul*" (Matt. 10:28). Instead, He encourages us in our confession and reminds us that "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against*" His church.

Of course, we don't always get things right. Surely, we're not as vocal as we should be, or as articulate as we could be. But in Jesus, we have been brought out of our exile into the promised land. And now, with Jesus' deliverance by cross and resurrection held before our eyes, with God's word of forgiveness ringing in our ears, and with His word lighting our path, we'll continue to do battle against our powerful enemy, the world. With God's aid, we'll endure to the end. With the knowledge that through the incarnate Christ our human nature has been restored, and with the strength of His body and blood in us, we will rejoice and sing with all the faithful, "*O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

God grant it for the sake of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.