

THE CARRYING OF THE CROSS

For the word of the cross, to them indeed that perish, is foolishness; but to them that are saved, that is, to us, it is the power of God. - 1 Corinthians 1:18

Both the crib and the cross appear to be foolishness to the world. How could the creator of all things be born into abject poverty and subject Himself to the human condition? How could the salvation and redemption of humanity come about through the death of a Man on the cross?

My ways are not God's ways and God's ways are not my ways. I would have preferred that God be born into comfortable surroundings much like my own but in His wisdom He chose to associate Himself with all of His brothers and sisters by experiencing all that they experience thus making Him a worthy advocate. I would have preferred that sin and death be conquered through power, might, and miracles but God, in His wisdom, chose to show me that to serve is to reign and that sin and death can only be conquered through obedience and selflessness.

Lord Jesus, during this season of Advent and Christmas help me to remember that You are God and Your ways are far better than mine. Help me to submit myself to Your will in all things and learn the lesson that the servant is not greater than the master. Help me also to give witness to my friends and family at our meetings and celebrations that the crib and the cross are essential to our salvation and anything else is not of God. Lord, help me to carry my cross daily.

THE CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH

And the Lord said to him: Make a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign: whosoever being struck shall look on it, shall live. - Numbers 21:8

And she shall bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name JESUS. For he shall save his people from their sins.

- Matthew 1:21

During this season of Advent I often think of the message of the angel sent to Mary. I rejoice with her and with all of the people He will save from sin. I rejoice at this Good News and begin my period of waiting "in joyful hope for the coming of Our Savior".

However, I must never forget the price that was paid for this salvation.

Meditating on the Sorrowful Mysteries during Advent helps me to remember that Christmas becomes just another day without Easter and to imagine that the Cross was not present from Bethlehem to Calvary is to imitate Peter whom Jesus rebuked and called Satan.

Advent and Christmas are a time of joy and excitement because of the wonderful gift of the incarnation, Emmanuel, God with us. Yet, I should not forget that the Gospel reminds me that true joy and true excitement will never be found in this world but can only be found in Heaven. The Gospel also tells me that Heaven can only be reached by taking up my cross daily and by losing my life in order to gain eternal life. Christmas without the Cross is like Christmas without Christ.

Lord Jesus, help me to rejoice this Christmas over the great gift of Yourself to the world. Help me to carry my Cross daily during Advent and Christmas and unite all my sufferings with Your sufferings.

The Sorrowful Mysteries of Advent and Christmas



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THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.

- Genesis 3:19

Father, if thou wilt, remove this chalice from me: but yet not my will, but thine be done. And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed the longer. And his sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground.

- Luke 22:42-44

At the fall of Adam and Eve the garden of pleasure God created turned into a garden of agony for the human race.

Like every other person ever born Jesus' agony in the garden began at His birth. Jesus was born into the fallen garden of this world at Bethlehem and it was there that His agony began. He suffered poverty, cold, hunger, nakedness, and thirst during His first moments in this garden as well as during His last moments.

Lord Jesus, I rejoice during this time of remembering and waiting but help me to remember that you were the only person born with the sole purpose of dying, dying for me. Help me to remember that the cold and the darkness of the cave at Bethlehem was a foreshadowing of the cold and darkness of the sepulcher.

If the season gets to be too much for me with all the activities and events help me to separate myself from everything and spend time in prayer with You in the garden.

If I find myself alone during this season give me the strength to unite my suffering with Your agony in the garden and imitate You in praying "not my will, but thine be done."

THE CROWNING WITH THORNS

When Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of King Herod, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem. And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they adored him; and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And plating a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand. And bowing the knee before him, they mocked him, saying: Hail, king of the Jews

- Matthew 2:1, 11; 27:29

Only with the eyes of faith could the shepherds and the wise men see that the infant in the manger was the King. Likewise, only those with the eyes of faith could see that the man crowned with thorns was the King.

At His birth shepherd brought their flocks to see the Shepherd. At His death the shepherds struck the Shepherd in an attempt to scatter the flock. At His birth the wise men brought Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. At His death the men who claimed to be wise gave Him nails, thorns, and gall.

Lord Jesus, during this season of Advent, please give me the grace to discern what sort of gifts I am bringing to You. Are the gifts from my heart? Are they fit for a King or are they gifts that will only cause You to suffer more?

Help me also to discern which shepherds I am following. Are they the shepherds You put in place to lead and guide me or are they wolves dressed as shepherds. Finally, help me to seek out those who are truly wise and seek You with their whole hearts and avoid those who claim to be wise but seek only their own gain.

THE SCOURGING AT THE PILLAR

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

- Luke 2:7

And stripping him, they put a scarlet cloak about him. Then he released to them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him unto them to be crucified. And after they had mocked him, they took off the cloak from him, and put on him his own garments, and led him away to crucify him.

-Matthew 27:28, 26, 31

At the scourging at the pillar my eyes turn toward Your Mother. Only she had ever seen you stripped naked with your flesh exposed to the world. And she comforted you and wrapped you in swaddling clothes. But here the man who was once that child in the swaddling clothes is stripped of His garments. The flesh that was once soft and supple, pink and purple is now torn and bruised, purple and red.

With each lash of the whip she waits to hear You cry out as You did in the cave at Bethlehem so long ago. She waits in anticipation for Your cry but You utter not a word and it is the silence that pierces her heart.

Lord Jesus, help me to draw closer to Your Mother this Advent. Help me to remember the suffering that she endured and that that suffering was also the result of my sins. Help me to resolve with the help of Your grace to sin no more for love of You and her. And when I look upon the image of the Child wrapped in swaddling clothes help me to remember that by Your wounds I am healed.