

This evening you are stepping back into the late middle ages. A time of mystery plays that were sermons in song, visual symbolism, and drama from ancient times.

The Gaudete festival was the climax of the Advent season celebrated on Gaudete Sunday – with minstrels, circle dances, drama, banners and food.

We present three compressed mystery plays tonight: (1) Nativity, (2) The Crimson Nightingale and the Boy of Naivety, and (3) Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day.

The late Middle Ages were such a different time than ours. Of course, you are all familiar with the Living Nativity, our first mystery play. On the first banner, the Virgin Mary holds a rose. The word 'Gaudete' means 'rejoice and celebrate'. The *Gaudete* carol text translated is 'Rejoice! Celebrate Christ's birth of the Virgin Mary.' The third candle of the Advent wreath is ROSE colored. In the hymn "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming", the rose is a symbol of the Virgin Mary – a rose sprouting from the tree of Jesse. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the rose that has sprung up to bring forth a child, who is represented as a small flower. The hymn (which we will be singing in a little while) says: "Here, a maid was found with child, yet remained a virgin mild. In her womb, this truth was shown – God was there upon his throne."

The second banner is the manger in the tent with bright light above it. The tent is on a battle ground. From the manger, new born light shines in glory through the night. Darkness there no more resides. In this light, faith now abides. In the song "This Little Babe", the text shows the battle of the baby Jesus with sin, death, and the devil. While we expect peace on earth, good will

toward people, it is very startling to hear the forceful marshall and battle imagery describing this event. By God becoming man, this birth is a clandestine surprise attack on the forces of evil. Who would expect God to send a baby to vanquish Satan? But, as the song says: “This little Babe, so few days old, is come to rifle Satan's fold. All hell doth at His presence quake. For in this weak unarmed disguise The gates of hell He will surprise. His naked breast stands for a shield; His battering shot is His crying. His arrows are His eyes looking; His warriors steed is feeble flesh. His camp is pitched in a stall. The crib is His trench. He assembles the shepherds with angel troops as his army.”

The third banner is the sword and flames. The Word of God is a two-edged sword: Christ Himself. As the book of Ephesians says, “Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” “Christ conquers sin, death and the devil. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them.” (Revelation 19) Around the throne on each side are four living creatures, who look like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle; each of them with six wings, and full of eyes in front and behind (Revelation 4:6-8). And day and night, they never cease saying, “Holy, holy holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is, and who is to come.”

I hope you will feast your eyes on the banners.

The second mystery play is the story of the Crimson Nightingale and the Boy of Naivete. We don't have nightingales in North America, so you need to know that they are naturally a dull brown but in this play they are crimson. The blood red crimson color is used to make the nightingale a symbol of evil. The play begins with a boy – the so-called child of naivete. He is busy

telling us about Mary's song of praise to Jesus, the Lord of all. Her song – the *Magnificat* is really the story of Jesus. But, along comes the crimson nightingale who sings a more glamorous seductive song. The boy of naivete is tempted and attracted to this evil. He grabs the crimson nightingale, making it his own – thereby falling into sin. Just like Adam and Eve partaking of the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; disobeying God's command. This will destroy the boy's faith if he does not repent. It's the same kind of tension we all live with – where good things enter our lives and take our attention away from spiritual things. The song *That Yonge Child* describes this by saying, “Whoso attends to her song (of the Nightingale) and leaveth the first (the song of praise to Jesus sung by Mary in the *Magnificat*) does wrong.”

In the second act of this story, the boy Jesus has revealed Himself to the boy of naivete. The song *I Sing of a Maiden* describes the miraculous appearance of Jesus the Savior. On hearing this, the boy of naivete repents and follows Jesus. This is shown tonight by the boy following the second banner in a procession down the middle aisle.

On the final banner is depicted the boy Jesus who has a white dove above His head. This dove appeared to Jesus at His baptism – the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and came to rest on Him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased.” So, we now have two birds – a nightingale and a dove. Watch what happens! The boy of naivete follows Jesus to the altar, bows in front of Him repenting of his sins, and then drops the nightingale in the field. Just like this boy, WE are called to live a life of confession and forgiveness, and to prepare our hearts for the Word made flesh, who comes

to dwell among us.

In Act 3 of this story, the boy of naivete once again has sadly wandered away from Jesus, and his life has lost meaning and purpose. He succumbs once again to the nightingale and its temptations. The source of the nightingale's power demands the nightingale back from the boy, and then tries to kill him. That, of course, would be the devil. But the Messenger of Inspiration stops this. That Messenger is the voice of the Gospel. At this moment in the story, something strange and marvelous happens. At the feet of Jesus, the nightingale changes by turning from red (the color of evil in this story) to white. The white nightingale now represents the Holy Spirit spreading the good news to all people. The gift of the living Word of God made man IS sharper than a two-edged sword, and can overcome ALL evil. Jesus is the Word made flesh. Isaiah informs us that the mouth of the Messiah is like a sharp sword. (Isaiah 49), and with His lips He will slay the wicked (Isaiah 11). When you put your trust in Jesus, all of hell takes aim against you; intending evil upon your life. But here is the marvel: God uses evil to accomplish good. And so ends the story of the Nightingale and the Boy of Naivete.

The final mystery play is called “Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day.” Its aim is to show us that the ENTIRE life of Christ is the redeeming act of God. We even sing this in the carol *What Child Is This?*: “Why lies He in such mean estate, Where ox and ass are feeding? Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, the cross be borne for me, for you; Hail, hail the Word made flesh, The Babe, the Son of Mary.”

This same message is in *Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day*. The song compares the life of Christ to a holy dance. Each

stanza focuses on a different portion of Christ's life.

His becoming man in the manger, where angels, cherubim
and creation worship.

His death on the cross, with the soldier piercing His body
with a spear, causing blood and water to come forth.

His descent into hell.

And finally, His rising from the dead on the third day.

In this song, Jesus does these things for mankind, His true love,
who He calls to join in the dance and become LITTLE Christs
by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

One other unusual textual things happens in the carol *Unto Us a
Boy Is Born* which you will be singing this evening. There are
two languages in this text, English and Latin. When this
happens, this is called a macaronic text. The translations for the
Latin phrases show the beautiful richness of this text.

Alpha and Omega (He is the beginning and the end)

Cantemus in chora (We sing in chorus)

Benedicamus Domino (Let us bless the Lord)

A second macaronic carol sung tonight is *There Is No Rose of
Such Virtue*.

There is no rose of such virtue as is the rose that bare Jesu. The
third candle of the Advent Wreath is rose colored for Gaudete
Sunday. There was even a rose in Germany where this carol
originated, that was rose colored, that bloomed in December in
Germany.

Translations of the Latin part of the text are as follows

Res miranda (miraculous thing)

Pares forma (created in the Parent - God's image)

Gaudeamus (We rejoice)

Transeamus (We cross over to Christ's world reality when

we follow this joyful birth)

The name of this festival is GAUDETE which is the climax of the Advent season, which was originally penitential in nature EXCEPT for that third Sunday. The very first word used in two of the historic texts used in services on that Sunday was 'Gaudete', which means REJOICE.

'Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:1)

'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord' (Zachariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26)

The text of the *Gaudete* carol, the very last song in our festival is sung in Latin, and means 'Rejoice, for Christ is born of the Virgin Mary. Let us celebrate. The time of grace has come – what we have wished for; God has become man. The world has been renewed by the reigning Christ. When the light rises, Salvation has been found. Therefore, let our preaching now sing in brightness; Let it bless the Lord: Greeting to our King!'

This carol was NOT sung in church on Gaudete. In fact NO CAROLS were ever sung in church services period. They were sung AFTER church in the village festival. And they would set up platforms around the village square and perform mystery plays. That in fact is what the Gaudete Festival is. And in a very real way, Gaudete is the ultimate Advent celebration.

In front of these platforms where they performed mystery plays or did living nativity scenes were musicians called minstrels who sang carols and played instruments. Sometimes these carols were

sung by choirs. And in front of these musicians were dancers. All carols were not only sung, but also danced to (usually in circle dances).

Tonight we reenact the Gaudete Festival in spirit. We have all the texts, but only the music for three of the carols. The rest of the musical settings of these texts are a collaboration between Paul Lindblad and the late Carl Schalk. Our Gaudete festival explores all the themes of advent in hymns, prayers, and carols. There will be Renaissance dance, organ, strings, bells, percussion, carols, hymns, prayers, processions, tableaux, banners, costumes, special effects and food!

This festival is a celebration of the meaning of Advent:

***“Then stepped forth the Lord of all
From His pure and kingly hall;
God of God, yet fully man.
His heroic course began.
God the Father was His source,
Back to God He ran His course.
Into hell His road went down,
Back then to His throne and crown.
Now the manger's halo brightness
Hallows night with newborn light;
Let not night this light subdue,
Let our faith shine ever new.”***

(Savior of the Nations, Come; stanzas 4-6)

Please enjoy the theological, aural, and visual richness of the texts, artwork, dancing, and music as you experience the Gaudete festival.