

Minor Festivals: St. Thomas, The Apostle December 21

The Twin



Perhaps for a December newsletter, you would expect to read an opening article about Advent and/or Christmas. The church year begins with Advent, which means “Coming.” During Advent we prepare our hearts for the Advent of our King. His First Advent, which we celebrate as Christmas, reminds us to lift our eyes to the skies, awaiting his Second Advent on the Last Day.

December is dominated by these very important spiritual truths. Because of the emphasis on Advent and Christmas, other Christian festivals of December are sometimes forgotten. Did you know that December 21 is the Festival of St. Thomas, the Apostle? The Aramaic word “Thomas” and the Greek word “Didymus” both mean “Twin.” Evidently Thomas had a twin about whom we have no information.

There’s not much information about Thomas in the Bible either. We know that he was a bold follower of Jesus. When our Lord was returning to Judea, the disciples knew there was danger because the Jewish religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus. This didn’t intimidate Thomas. He said, “Let us also go that we may die with him.” He’s a good example for us. May we follow Jesus no matter what the personal cost may be. Whether it’s losing a friend because we refuse to compromise when it comes to God’s Word, or losing a job or wealth because we refuse to do something unethical.

On the night before our Lord’s death, Thomas asked Jesus a question that provoked an answer which shows us in no uncertain terms that there is only one way to heaven. Jesus said to his disciples, “You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas replied, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus responded, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Apart from Jesus, a person cannot get to heaven. Through Jesus, a person is assured of heaven. Isn’t this the single most important Truth that anyone can be made aware of? We treasure this Truth. And because we know without Jesus people will go to hell, we do all that we can to share this Truth.

And then there’s “doubting Thomas.” On that first Easter night Thomas wasn’t present when the risen Savior appeared to the other disciples. When told about the resurrection, Thomas didn’t believe it. He said, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.” A week later, Jesus met Thomas’ demand. When invited to inspect the Savior’s wounds, Thomas blurted out a beautiful confession, “My Lord and my God!” Thomas hit the nail on the head. That’s precisely who Jesus is—our God who shed his blood to purchase us from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. May Thomas’ simple and sublime confession always fill our hearts with wonder!

What happened to Thomas after Jesus ascended into heaven? The Bible doesn’t specifically say. We know that he spent the rest of his life sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that precious, blood-bought souls could be snatched from the devil’s clutches. Early Christian tradition says that he went to India and built a church with his own hands (thus the square on his symbol). Tradition also says that he was shot with arrows, stoned, and left for dead. A pagan priest came and ran him through with a spear (thus the spear on his symbol).

In the end, the Festival of St. Thomas, the Apostle has more to do with Advent and Christmas than you might think at first glance. Because of the virgin birth, Jesus is true God and true Man in one person—our perfect Savior—the only Way to heaven. Because of the virgin birth, Thomas’ confession, “My Lord and my God,” is true. Because of the Christmas gift wrapped up in swaddling clothes, we have a gift worth giving to the world, even if it should cost us our life.

Pastor Zuberbier

After sharing this devotion with your family, take the time to read John 20:19-31.