



## *St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd*

### The Collect for Christmas Day

*(Book of Common Prayer)*

**Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin: Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.**

Christmas emerged as a festival of the western church during the course of the fourth century. Two main theories exist as to why 25 December was chosen as its date. The first suggests it was chosen to counteract Rome's winter solstice festival of 'the Invincible Sun' (*Sol Invictus*) established in 274 by the Emperor Aurelian. This Sun was declared the sole protector of the empire, and the church may have chosen 25 December to assert the Christian alternative. The second theory, gaining ground since the 1980s, is based on our forebears' fascination with dates. Around 25 March had early been settled on as the time of the crucifixion. Reckoning that dates must relate to each other in a precise way, it was concluded that Jesus was also conceived on 25 March; and a projection of an exact nine months' gestation period from that date resulted in 25 December as the day to celebrate the nativity of Jesus.

This collect was newly composed for the Prayer Book of 1549. It originally said "this day to be born" rather than "as at this time to be born". The substitution was made in 1662 because this prayer remains the collect for the Christmas season (in addition to any feast-day collect during this period).

There is a connexion in the prayer between Jesus being "born" and our being "regenerate", or re-born. There is also a thread in the prayer which links Jesus being born as a child with our being God's children through his "adoption and grace". This collect therefore reminds us of our own spiritual birth and status as God's children.

The incarnation has a paradoxical quality about it. Jesus took "our nature upon him"; he knew our lives, as a human being. Yet he was God's "only-begotten" Son. The word begotten stems from the Council of Nicaea in 325. Some were asserting that, though Christ shared characteristics with God the Father, he was a lesser being, and there was a time when God created him.

The Nicene Creed used 'begotten' to make it clear that God the Son was not a creature of the Father's, and that he was fully God, as indistinguishable from the Father as a source of light is indistinguishable from the light streaming from it. Christ, affirms the Creed in belt and braces style, is "*God of God, Light of light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father*" (my emphasis).

Christmas Day marks the start of God's drawing us back to himself through Jesus who shared our life. Through grace, we are God's children, and therefore the brothers and sisters of each other. Jesus lived and preached the Kingdom of God, revealing that this brother-and-sisterhood is intended by God for everyone, and in this sense each human being is to be valued as our sister or our brother. Christmas, then, is not just for Christmas: because of Jesus's birth we can "daily be renewed by the Holy Spirit" for a regenerate life, wherein we treasure each other through faith, hope and love.

*James Graham, December 2025*