

The City Church, New York

The Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession – Sunday December 31, 2006

Seventy years ago today, Gresham Machen, brilliant defender of the faith, slipped in and out of consciousness on his last day in this world. At one point he awoke, telling a friend that he'd had a vision of heaven: "Sam, it was glorious. It was glorious."

He passed into Christ's nearer presence on the first day of 1937, but not before sending a telegram to his best friend back east. These were his last written words: "I'm so thankful for active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." Let us pray.

Savior Christ:

We, too, are thankful for Your active obedience, for we know that our brother was right: we'd have no hope of salvation without Your active obedience on our behalf. So keep us from missing the true meaning of Christmases past, present and future, that we might always keep Messiah's Mass in Spirit and Truth. May we realize that Christmas was not a sun sign signaling the natural cycle of another cold and barren winter, but the Son of God's sign, signaling the supernatural, once and for all, coming of salvation. Help us to reach up to Your reaching down to us that our response might be worthy of Your coming, O Emmanuel – God with us. May we realize that Christmas was no arbitrary break for a seasonal getaway, but the arrival of the unmerited mercy we so need for the breaking of our bondage to sin and death. Help us to reach up to Your reaching down to us that our response might be worthy of Your coming, O Emmanuel – God with us. May we realize that Christmas was not even a merely religious holiday among this world's religious holidays, but The Holy Day of Your Coming, You, who are, Yourself, The Way, The Truth and The Life. Help us to reach up to Your reaching down to us that our response might be worthy of Your coming, O Emmanuel – God with us, forevermore.

We thank you for Your gift of our faithful brother Gresham, for his witness to the truth against those who changed the truth of Your blessed Gospel into a lie, making Christmas nothing but a sentimental story of a sage who couldn't save anyone from sin and death.

As we move into another year of Yours, O Lord – a milestone in our pilgrimage – may we be diligent disciples, eager to do Your will along the only Way that leads us Home.

Thank You for hearing and answering prayer, as we add the words You taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.