

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) - The hope of Christmas is real; and we are part of that hope.

December 24/25, 2020

Merry Christmas!!! Oh holy night The stars are brightly shining It is the night of our dear saviour's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error, pining 'Til He appeared and the soul felt it's worth A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn'. Fall on your knees, oh, hear the Angels' voices? Oh, night divine, oh, night when Christ was born. Oh, night divine, oh, night, oh night divine. I read a story some years ago. A family with three kids was sitting around the Christmas tree after the children's Christmas mass, the yummy supper and guessing what the Christmas presents could be. Mom asked the kids: "What is the first gift of Christmas?" The kids pondered and responded: Barbie Dolls, Ninja Turtle, LEGO Then one kid asked Mom what's hers. Mom replied: a child. The couple's first child "died and born" seven months into the pregnancy while still in mother's womb on Christmas Eve in a multi-cars accident caused by a drunk driver. With prayers and condolences from friends and family, the couple got out from depression to let go and let God. As Pope St John XXIII said, *"Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what it is still possible for you to do."* The death of the child became the hope of the future for the couple. **"The first gift of Christmas is a child."** On the first Christmas, **Mary gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger - there was no place for them to stay in the inn.** (Luke 2:7).

Brothers and sisters, I am sure if Mary and Joseph were dressed wealthy, the inn keeper might find them a place in the inn instead of sending them to a manger. But Mary and Joseph were tired and probably dirty from travelling 90 dangerous and dirty miles. So, that first Christmas, the manger was open. Since that night, the new-born child is our living link with God, who is always near to those who welcome him with an open heart. This child comes down from heaven to earth with timeless blessings to soften hardness of hearts, to raise us up to a life far beyond any human expectations. You see, it is our calling, our task, our glory, to create that manger, that place where there is room for the Lord to be born. We, the church, are to make that space, and if willing, we are able, both within ourselves, and within our world.

There was no place in the inn does not end on a note of hopelessness. Rather, it is dripping with hope. As Christmases past have been: both that first Christmas in Bethlehem and our own personal histories, **what draws us most compellingly is hope: hope for this present Christmas, and hope for the future.** Christmas offers us and the whole world another opportunity to welcome that child, our gift. Welcoming our Christmas says that **children are good news, whether inside or outside the womb, and children must take a central place in the nation's heart.** Christmas says that children will come, even if no room is made for them. Christmas says, **"Accept, respect and receive children as God's own people, made in God's own image, and sent as a sign of hope."** It is a hope that guarantees the continuity of humanity, the ongoing care of creation and the balance between memory and prophecy, anticipation and reflection. **This is a hope that guarantees our very salvation. As the baby Jesus is seen again and again in each child, we cannot help but realize the great responsibility and trust which God has placed into our hands and that of the whole world.** Yes, as you are reading this now, there are thousands and thousands of pregnant women in the world, some even in our community looking for places to give birth. Let us do all we can to honour children as God's own people, making a place for them in the culture and in our households, lifting them up, singing praises to God for all we have heard and seen.

In the nativity story, Luke tells angel came to the shepherds to announce the great news and his first words were, **"Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring**

great joy to all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:10-12) And the story goes on to tell how the shepherds went to Bethlehem to "see this thing that has happened, which the Lord" told them. Then the shepherds returned to their homes "**singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen.**" The shepherds, angels, and that quiet birth where peace, compassion, and gentleness are part of God's good news for all people. God comes in gentleness, in love, and with the hope of peace-**peace for our world, peace for our own lives.**

We want things to get better; we want this birth to keep happening in our lives, and in our world. And the good news of Christmas is that it does keep happening. God will never abandon us. God still comes to us, pretty much as God did that first Christmas; and God is still trying to reach us, and our world, pretty much as He tried that first Christmas. Things haven't really changed all that much. The hopes and fears of all the years are about the same now as they have always been. Life is more comfortable for some, less so for others, maybe more complicated for most. And still, God reaches out to us. Pretty much as He reached out on that first Christmas. But one thing that has changed since that first Christmas is that we are here, the church is here. That makes a difference. We are the angels sent to sing the good news to the outcasts, the unpopular, the unlikely recipients of God's special attention and concern. Now God has given us the task to proclaim His saving mercy to those the world has neglected or despised: the elderly, the poor, the unemployed, the lonely, the discriminated, the persecuted and women pregnant with child in their wombs worrying about the future, They are longing to hear the word of peace like the song first sung by angels. That word is now ours to speak; that song is now ours to sing. Children are gifts from God, our future and hope. This role of ours, the business of being the manger and of being the angels is one of the ways God calls us and makes us part of God's great gift to the world. **We can only be whole, our best hopes can only be fulfilled, as we reach out with God's hands, and with God's voice.**

The happiness and peace of Christmas comes from within, when God is born in the stable of our hearts. What we want most from Christmas is hope. Some of the wonderful parts of this great Christmas story are ours to live, ours to give, ours to have. We are a part of the hope of Christmas. The Christmas story goes on. The great miracle continues as God reaches out to the world in love. For, as in Bethlehem of Judea, so today; God is with us, God is for us, God comes to us. The light that Isaiah foretold, the light first seen fully in Bethlehem, that light is still coming into the world. We are not just spectators, we are not just consumers -- we are also players. **The hope of Christmas is real; and we are part of that hope. Joy to the world! The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King! Let every heart prepare Him room. And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and nature sing. And heaven, and heaven and nature sing. Joy to the world then we sing. Let the earth receive her King! Joy to the world then we sing. Let the angel voices ring. Merry Christmas!!!**