

Christmas, the Nativity of Jesus December 25, 2017

Readings: Isaiah 9:1-6 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14

Christmas is God's special gift to humankind and especially to each one of us. It is the day when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the God-man who came into the world to save us. He was born in utter poverty and destitution yet in obedience to God that he may establish God's kingdom on earth. Today the Christmas message of joy is proclaimed to the entire world and the church recaptures it in three stages. First there is the anxious expectancy expressed by Prophet Isaiah that those who walked in darkness have seen a great light. The king will come and bring peace and justice to the world. The people have been given new hope and joy. Second is the actual coming expressed in the simplest narratives of a journey, the birth of a child, and the angels singing. Lowly shepherds are the first to be informed about the miraculous event. The good news given to them is shared by all. Third is the theological reflection that the child expected has come and in him the Grace of God is revealed and the salvation has been made possible for all. It comes to us through the saving work of Christ. Yet we wait in hope that the Lord will come again. God chooses to come to us as a helpless infant and that too born in humblest of all circumstances. He did it because he loves us and he wants to share himself with us. He does not want merely to exist alongside us but wants to be a part of everything that we are. Hence on this day God became one of us, to love each one of us intimately, passionately and without any limit.

Christmas is a celebration of joy, hope and peace. It is a feast of joy to celebrate the greatest moment in history to tell everyone that the saviour is born, good news is announced and newness is proclaimed. On this day we meet each other and greet each other with the festal wishes, exchange cards, gifts and sweets. We share with each other this happy moment that even enemies speak to each other and those who are fighting will call it a day of truce. They cannot fight on a Christmas day for sure. They will continue the next day. It is a joy of love when God showed his love for us by sending his own beloved son who will continue to live with us forever. This is the ultimate expression of God's love for us. It is the day when the earth is transformed as God comes to dwell in the human context. Hope is given to the world that exists in a hopeless situation. The savior has entered the world; the creator has become a creature, to give the world a new dignity. God has emptied himself to fill us with hope. It is a day of peace to the world that is struggling with conflicts and disturbance. This message of peace was proclaimed by the angels at birth of Jesus: peace to those of good will. Jesus the God of peace

will give his peace for us and this peace will last forever. His birth has transformed the world.

The first reading from Prophet Isaiah reminds us of the blessings the promised Messiah brought to humanity. We have the reason to thank God for sending us the saviour and for having made us members of his chosen people. Isaiah knew about the vulnerability and oppression of the kingdom due to the misguided policies of former kings. The prophet's words paint an image of darkness, gloom, heavy burdens trampling boots and cloaks soaked with blood. But God has a plan for restoration. The time has come for people to walk with the light of faith. The reading tells us that the people see a great light leading them out of the gloom and darkness surrounding them. The faithless leadership of Judah's kings left the people vulnerable to the enemies. The prophet is confident that God will not leave them alone. The Light is on the way and the people will rejoice and their land will yield a rich harvest. The country will be free from the ravages of war. The light of faith will have its origin from the royal line of David. Here Isaiah sees the birth of a royal child who will lead the way for the people. This child will sit on David's throne and the new age has dawned. They will give this royal son titles that will display his gifts. This child will be a counsellor, a hero, a father and a prince of peace. However, all the glory belongs to God.

In the second reading Paul writing to Titus says that the grace of God has appeared in bodily form in Jesus. God's freely given love, God's grace, is a power that has entered the lives of Christians and enables them to live a Christ like life. It trains them to reject whatever would lead them away from God and practice virtue. This first took place at the birth of Jesus. It became more manifest when he gave himself on the cross for our salvation. It continues to manifest itself in the church in its eagerness to do well. At the same time the church looks forward to the final coming of Jesus. Then grace will become glory as Jesus saves us from sin. Paul says that God's goodness and kindness in creating us had more than our span on this earth in view for us. He gave us gifts capable of knowing and understanding him and capable of enjoying a share in his own divine happiness. Christ came to save humankind from evil and make all the people eager to do what is good. By living such a life we are able to await confidently the coming of Christ in glory.

The Gospel of Luke gives us the narrative about the birth of Jesus placing him at the centre of the secular Roman history. Caesar Augustus had called for a census and he expected each adult male to report and register in his home country. Hence Joseph had to go to Bethlehem along with Mary to his native country. There Jesus was born in a manger or a cave because there was no

room for them in the inn. The creator of the universe could not find a place for his own son on earth. His warmth was from the animals; his visitors were the shepherds, the illiterate the reject of the society who everyone looked at with scant respect. Later it was the foreigners, pagans who came to visit and offer him the gifts fit for the king and a priest. The angels become his messengers and proclaim the good news. There was no grandeur, no pomp or salute of guns for the arrival of a king. Instead there is the total silence and quietness at his arrival. The gospel tells us that Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in the manger because they had no room in the inn. There was no place for him as all the inns were all occupied because of the crowds. They could not provide a place for the saviour of the world though unknowingly and the outstanding event of history went unnoticed. Yet the whole atmosphere was suffused with joy. There was the joy of the angels and the enthusiasm of the shepherds as they hasten to Bethlehem to find the new-born child. Joy is a theme which goes right through Luke's gospel. It is one of the characteristics of the true Christian.

Today the new king is born to us and he is not like any other secular king. From his birth to death all that surrounded him is contrasted with the secular king and his kingdom. The first people to find out about his birth are not the royal officials, religious officials, military leaders or the wealthy elite. Such would be the case with a secular king. Here the first people to be informed are the shepherds whose social and political status would be among the lower ranks. It is to such as these the angels announce the birth of Jesus and declare he is the saviour messiah and the Lord. There is no palace or royal household for him but is wrapped in swaddling clothes and is placed in a manger. The story is fulfilled on the cross where a king is hanging on a cross and is crowned with thorns and is made an item of mockery before all peoples. Yet he is the real king born for us. We are aware that Christmas is the birthday of Jesus and we share it too since we are reborn as the children of God through Jesus on this day. St John tells us that all those who received him and believed in his name, he gave the power to be the children of God. This is the news of great joy and he is the great light that has appeared in the world. This child that is born in the world, a son is given to us in order to make us children of God. He will uphold justice and righteousness forever. This light has come in the lives of people for the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Hence the Angels could joyfully announce to all "Glory to God in the highest and peace to those of good will."

Christmas is indeed a hard reality. It is a day when we realize that the whole world has changed. It is a day of joy and sharing, of love and forgiveness. He

has come to infuse transformation in every area of life. Today God tells us that we have to change and respond to God who has become man. For Mary and Joseph it was a hard reality. They had leave their home and go to a totally unknown place. They have to put up with all difficulties and move along with the crowds. Even God does not change anything to help his own son. When the new baby is born there is no celebration but only silence. Their visitors are the shepherds the discard of the society. We have beautiful statues carved and them carrying the sheep. But they were actually ruffians, the hired ones as Jesus says with little concern for the sheep. They were the outcasts of the society, generally considered unreliable persons. They were chosen as God's choice is unique and special. It shows the freedom of God and he chooses the ones he loves. Then there were the angels the messengers of God who bring the message of peace and show the sign of the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in the manger. They all respond to the coming of the Lord into the world.

When Jesus first came into the world about two thousand years ago, his arrival was in fulfilment of the promises of God. Scriptures tell us that from the fall of the first parents God promised to send us a redeemer. The people of God waited eagerly for him. Sometimes they showed their fidelity to God and at other times they failed. In spite of this God sends his son to the world. The birth of Jesus is a reminder that God has not forgotten us. It is a reminder of how much God loves us. It is a reminder that God has reached down to us so we in turn may reach up to Him with praises and glory in thanksgiving for our salvation. Indeed, we have not been forsaken by God. By his birth in this world of darkness and confusion, the God who became man shows us his will to accept the entire humanity to himself and to raise it up and integrate it into God's loving plan. Today's Gospel very carefully sets the tone both for the personal lifestyle of Jesus and of the purpose for which he has come, to share his peace love and joy. Like the shepherds who went with haste and shared the good news, we as Christians are also called to go with haste and share the good news. The Gospel chosen for the morning mass tells us how the word which existed from the beginning became incarnate for us and pitched his tent among us. John tells us that he is the light that shines in the darkness and takes away the darkness from within us. As Christians, we are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation, as a right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the Divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth. This duty is even more pressing when it is only through us as individual persons that some may hear the Gospel and know Christ. Today as we greet each other with the Christmas message, we pray to the Baby Jesus to give us

the gift of Peace, Joy and hope. We ask him to make us his messengers to the world as he did to the simple shepherds of Bethlehem. We ask him to fill our hearts with that peace and to make us his witnesses in the world. Let us look at Mary, the person who kept all things in her heart and contemplated over them and ask from her the confidence to share the message with all.

What is the spirit of Christmas for us today? It is to make room for all who are sad, empty in their lives, that that are depressed and discarded by others. Once, the fourth grade students of a school put up a short Nativity play during the time of Christmas. Among the actors there was a boy who was larger in size, yet kind at heart and wanted to be shepherd and carry the sheep on his shoulder; but because of his size, the teacher made him inn keeper to drive out Mary and Joseph, a role he reluctantly agreed to play. As the play went on Joseph came in and pleaded the inn keeper for some room. The little innkeeper loudly told them there is no room and they must leave. He started moving away. Then Mary turned to Joseph and started crying. This made the inn-keeper boy to turn back and instead of moving away angrily as in the play, he came back to the surprise of all, said softly to Mary and Joseph, look there is no room here in the inn but you can take my room and have all the privacy you need. True the play went off the track but this showed the spirit of Christmas that there is room for every one if we choose to give it. Similarly Jesus who had no room saw that we all would secure room in his birth. Now the poor, lame, blind, lepers and all will find a room in the babe of Bethlehem. The presence of Jesus gave room for everyone. This is because she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in the manger because there was no room for them in the inn; but Jesus found room for us all by emptying himself.

Once upon a Christmas Eve, a man sat in reflective silence before the fireplace, pondering the meaning of Christmas. "There is no point to a God who becomes man," he mused. "Why would an all-powerful God want to share even one of His precious moments with the likes of man? And even if He did, why would He choose to be born in an animal stall? No way! The whole thing is absurd! I'm sure that if God really wanted to come down to earth, He would have chosen some other way." Suddenly, the man was roused from his reverie by a strange sound outside. He went to the window and saw a small gaggle of blue geese frantically honking and aimlessly flopping about in the snow. They seemed dazed and confused. Apparently they had dropped out in exhaustion from the flight formations of a larger flock on its way from the Arctic Islands to the warmer climes of the Gulf of Mexico. Moved to compassion, the man tried to "shoo" the poor geese into his warm garage, but the more he "shooed" the more they panicked. "If they only realized I'm only trying to do what's best for

them,” he thought to himself. “How can I make them understand my concern for their well-being?” Then, this thought came to him: “If for just a minute, I could become one of them, an ordinary goose, and communicate with them in their own language, they would know what I am trying to do.” And suddenly ... suddenly, he remembered Christmas and a smile came over his face. Suddenly, the Christmas story no longer seemed absurd. Suddenly, he pictured that ordinary-looking infant, lying in the manger, in that stable in Bethlehem, and he knew the answer to his Christmas problem: God had become one of us to tell us that He loves us.

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