

## **Christmas Midnight - Year C December 25, 2015**

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

Christmas is a celebration of joy, hope, peace and light. It is a feast of joy as we celebrate the greatest moment in history and announce that the saviour is born, good news is given and newness is proclaimed. The whole atmosphere is also suffused with joy, the joy of the angels and 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. On this day we greet each other, exchange cards, gifts and sweets. We share with each other this happy moment that even enemies speak to one another and those who are fighting the war 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 as he gives his own son to us. It is the day when the earth is transformed as God is close to us. Hope is given to the world that exists in a hopeless situation and is looking for liberation. The saviour 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 the newness of life. 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 as they announce the good news to the shepherds. Jesus the God of peace will give his peace to us and this peace will remain forever. The birth of Jesus has transformed the whole world.

Christmas is God's special and personal gift to humankind. On this day we celebrate the birth of Jesus, born in utter poverty and destitution in the eyes of the world but in obedience to God to establish his kingdom on earth. Today the Christmas message 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 of Jesus in time, expressed in the simplest narratives of a journey, the helplessness of Mary and Joseph, the birth of a child, and the angels singing and the lowly shepherds being chosen as the first recipients of the good news. 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 become part of the humanity 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. On this day God became one of us, to love each one of us intimately, passionately and without any limit. This is the meaning of Christmas for us where God becomes one with humankind.

Christmas presents us a situation much different from other divine situations. It is an event that brought about total change and transformation, yet it remained a hard reality to the humanity. It is a day when we realize that the whole world has changed with the birth of this divine person. It is a day of happiness and sharing, of love and forgiveness, joy and acceptance. Jesus has come to our humanity to infuse transformation in every segment of life. Today God tells us that we have to change and respond to the one who has become man. For Mary and Joseph it was a hard reality. They had leave their home and go to a strange, totally unknown place. They had to put up with all difficulties and struggles while moving along with the crowds. Even God does not change anything to help his own son. When the child, who is the divine person is born there is no celebration of any sort. There is only simple and meditative silence. Their visitors are the shepherds, simple ordinary persons. We have beautiful statues carved and them carrying the sheep on their shoulders. But they were actually the outcasts of the society, the hired ones as Jesus says, with little concern for the sheep. They were specially chosen by God to be his messengers. It shows the freedom of God and he chooses the ones he loves for his mission. Later it was the foreigners, pagans who came to visit and offer him the gifts fit for the king and a priest. Then there were the angels the messengers of God who bring the message of peace and direct the shepherds to the manger where the baby is kept wrapped in swaddling clothes. They all respond to the coming of the Lord into the world.

The readings resonate with the theme of light and the baby in the manger is the Light of the World. Light surrounds the shepherds as the angels sing their praises of God: "Glory to God in the highest and, on earth, peace to all who are favoured by God." The Gospel of Luke tells us 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. Today's Gospel very carefully sets the tone both for the personal lifestyle of Jesus and the purpose for which he was born. Certainly there was no grand romantic surroundings. The town of Bethlehem was filled with people who had come to register themselves for the census ordered by

the Emperor. The purpose of the census was mainly to collect more taxes for his treasury. Here Mary and Joseph could not find a decent place to stay. They had to move to an empty stable, a dirty and smelly place. The child is placed in a feeding box as the only available cot. There was no place for the creator of the universe in this little world. Yet the Gospel tells us that there was the joy of the angels and the enthusiasm of the shepherds who hasten to Bethlehem to find the new-born child. Joy is a theme presented to us and is the strength of Christians.

The first reading from Prophet Isaiah speaks of the great light that will scatter all darkness. The Prophet was aware of the vulnerability and oppression of the kingdom due to the misguided policies of rulers. His 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. He reminds them of the many blessings the promised Messiah will bring to humanity. The faithless leadership of kings of Judah has left the people vulnerable to their enemies. They felt that all was lost for them. Now the prophet gives the people hope. He tells them that a child born to the royal house will usher in a new age of peace. There will be a total transformation in the society. Weapons of war will be smashed to pieces and military garments will be thrown into the fire. 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. This child that is born will sit on David's throne and the new age will have dawned. The new king will carry titles that could never have been given to the former kings of Israel. He will govern by right judgment and by justice. His titles, wonder counsellor, God-hero, Father-forever, Prince of Peace, show that he brings the reign of God into the world.

In the second reading Paul writing to his disciple Titus says that the grace of God the Father has appeared in a visible 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. We are able to reject evil and live for God. We have become people who belong to him eager to do what is good. 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. The grace given in Jesus for us engenders hope with the conviction that God is willing to save us. At the same time the church looks forward to the appearance of final glory seen in Jesus at the end times. Then

grace will turn into 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 tells us that the first to be invited to visit him are the shepherds: their status was much like the nomads found in nearly every society or any other marginalized group. They were the outcasts of the society. They were regarded by most of the society people as outsiders, not fit to be part of society. This, in fact, is Luke's way of setting the stage for Jesus' future life. Luke likes to emphasize that Jesus came especially for the poor and the needy, for the weak and marginalized. Later he will be accused of eating and drinking with sinners and disreputable outcasts and will finally permitted to die discredited as a criminal and among criminals. Some people could understand Jesus being on the side of the poor, those rejected by the society, the tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners. But, as some scholars have pointed out, Jesus loved the poor not because they were good but because they were poor. Today he reminds us that material poverty is not the only kind that exists in the world today. There is also moral poverty, emotional poverty, social poverty, physical poverty, where people are side-lined. Jesus emptied himself to be poor for us.

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. As Christmas Prefaces remind us, in the wonder of today Jesus has brought to the eyes of faith a new and radiant vision of God's glory. In Jesus we see our God made visible and so we are caught up in the love of the God we cannot see. Today in Christ a new light has dawned upon the world. God has become one with human race and the human race has become one again with God.

Originally, the Romans celebrated a feast on this day, called the festival of the unconquered Sun. Today in the darkness of this night Jesus born as a child shines out as a wonderful light beckoning all of us to realize our full potential. He was born in the manger as wrapped in swaddling clothes as there was no room for them in the inn. He came to give hope to those living in difficult situations. He came to help those who have no one to help, guide and support. He was present to transform the world. As we wish each other the joys of Christmas let us remind ourselves that we have a task to fulfil, to find a room to those who have no shelter and are helpless before God. 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." Let us also join the chorus of Angels to bring peace to the world.

The message of Christmas is very clear to us. 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. A little girl asked the family's dinner guest, "Do you like dolls?" The guest said that he indeed loves dolls. Then the girl asked him whether he wanted to see her collection of dolls. He said it would be wonderful and is willing to come with her. The little girl led him to her room and brought out her beautiful collection of dolls. Seeing this variety of collection the guest asked her which doll was her favourite. She hesitated for a while and from the collection picked out a well-worn, tattered doll. It was missing a button eye, obviously it was sewn in many places several times, and its dress was faded and frayed. She hugged the doll to her chest and said: "This is Annie, and I love her more than anyone else." The guest was surprised at that seeing her choose the ugliest one from among the collection of such beautiful dolls. He asked her why she loved this doll so much. He was surprised with her touching reply: "Well, if I don't love her, no one would."

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. True the play went off the track but the showed the spirit of Christmas that there is room for every one if we choose to give it.

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