

## NATIVITY OF THE LORD 2005/B

*“I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord”.*

It is in these terms that two thousand years ago the angels announced to the shepherds and the whole world the good news of the birth of Jesus. A child is born to us; God has given us a savior. All the readings of this feast try to situate Christmas at the heart of what God has done for us since the dawn of humanity. The 1<sup>st</sup> reading portrays this event from the background-situation of darkness and suffering in which the Jewish people were during the exile. In this terrible situation Isaiah attempts to raise hope by telling them that all this will end; a new day of immense joy and gladness is about to dawn.

To describe this joy, the prophet uses two comparisons, one taken from the life of a farm laborer and the second from experience of a hunter. In that day the joy will be like that of men at harvest time. They will be chanting and dancing because their food stores have been filled. People will be like happy hunters as they slaughter and share the spoils of their hunt, deer and antelopes they have caught.

But why should the people be happy? Is it just because of the catch or the harvest? No, beyond all that, the people have seen a great light: a child is about to be born and who will possess exceptional qualities. He will be wise, wonder-counselor, valiant and prince of peace. Extraordinary events will take place under his reign; all will at last enjoy freedom. Anything connected with fighting, violence, war, blood, oppression, will disappear. It will be a star of a new era of peace, justice and brotherhood.

My friends, when a prophet speaks, he does from the historical context in which he lives, but his vision transcends space and time. That is why when we look closely, we realize that such a prophecy was about Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus is the expected Messiah, proclaimed by the prophets and awaited by Israel. Today, a savior has been born to us; a king has come for us. But this king baffles us from the very beginning; he is not born in a great palace, but in a cave and does not possess any of means that humans hold as absolutely necessary to transform the world, namely money, weapons, power and powerful alliances.

This birth reveals from the very start, beyond any doubt, what the logic of God is like. People are convinced that the power of evil can only be overcome by using its own weapons. They think that violence can be eliminated by using even greater violence, that bloody wars are brought to an end by even bloodier wars. The Gospel read in this Christmas night shows us God who chooses poverty and weakness and teaches us to discard the human logic based on power and force, a logic that even Christians are tempted to apply. Right from his birth, Jesus has chosen to be found among the lowest and last in the society, the sinners, the outcasts, those who suffer most, those who have got it all wrong in life symbolized here by the shepherds. The Gospel of this holy night tells us that the Son of God has come into the world for them.

Christmas is the feast of the loving exchange between God and humanity. It is the celebration of the mystery of his coming into our world and the recognition of his dwelling among us. By

becoming a man God gives human beings access to his divinity as well as he shares in our humanity. From now then, we know that God is at the heart of our world; he is involved in our history and in our lives. He is our partner forever. Our history becomes his history; our life becomes his life and our concerns become his concerns. We cannot celebrate Christmas and overlook that God is sharing with us our victories and our defeats, our success and our failures.

Christmas reminds us that as human beings, we have to strive for God, that we have to live not only according to human patterns, but also according to God's law. Anytime we try separate God and human being, the divine and the human, we overlook the fundamental truth that God has become one of us to make us divine. Christmas reminds us that human fate and God's destiny are inseparable. There is no true humanity without God's adoration; there is no adoration without the respect and the service of human beings. But, it is also true that the service of human beings loses its meaning if it is not constantly renewed and deepened out of the source of the love God has revealed for us in Jesus Christ.

That is why we run a risk of losing the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus and the reason why he became a man. In fact, our society has made Christmas a feast of family, an opportunity to exchange presents and to meet friends. All this is legitimate, but I wonder if eventually we do not run the risk of making Christmas just folklore. The very recent debate about the celebration of Nativity gives me arguments. Some focusing on paschal event say that it is not important to celebrate Christmas; do they not forget that the birth of a person is the beginning of his life on earth? The subsequent changes someone undergoes in life, growing from young to adult, are not they steps of life that has started at birth? If Christ was not born, how could he die on the cross for us?

All this, my friends, is just to say that Incarnation and Redemption are linked. What happened on the cross is the outcome of the mystery that has started at the Incarnation. In other words, during the whole life of Jesus, from his birth to his resurrection, incarnation and redemption are weaved together; there is no way of separating them. The events of Incarnation and Redemption are one and indivisible, from the beginning of Jesus' earthly life to his death and resurrection. If the Incarnation is not conceived in the frame of Redemption, as the beginning of the healing of a sinful humanity, the paschal mystery becomes void, without foundation.

Because in Christmas event our salvation has already started, let us rejoice with the angels and all the men and the women of good will. Let us reject godless ways and worldly desires and live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age. Let us call upon the prince of peace to bring peace to our troubled world. Let us ask the infant Jesus to bring us his peace that surpasses all the good someone can wish for himself. Merry Christmas to everybody and God bless you on this Christmas season.



Homily Date: December 25, 2005  
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Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)  
Document Name: 20051225homily.pdf