

NATIVITY OF THE LORD: MASS AT MIDNIGHT C/2006

Tonight we are celebrating one of the most incredible events in human history, the birth of Jesus Christ and the beginning of our redemption. The incarnation of Jesus has changed the face of the universe and has given a new orientation to human history. Before Jesus Christ and after Jesus Christ, human history is not the same anymore. To better understand the importance of this feast, let us examine the Scriptures and listen to the prophecies contained within them.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah portrays a period of calamity and darkness that reigned over Israel. It is a period of repeated mistakes and continual rebellions in which the people have engaged before God. In the midst of this darkness a light is about to appear, a sign of hope is given, that is, a child who is to be born, a son who is to govern God's people in righteousness and peace.

The different kings, who reigned over Israel in history, have lived the dream of being this elected of God, but none of them was perfect enough to fit God's promise. Thus, there was in Israel a continued waiting of the fulfillment of God's promise until God sent his Son, to be the Messiah and the Savior of the world.

The Gospel of this holy night narrates what happened at that time when Jesus was brought into the world, in the small town of Bethlehem, in Palestine. The historical and geographical data surrounding this narrative intend to tell us that Jesus is not a tale or a legend. His birth took really place in this world and under particular circumstances. He is rooted in human history. He has a family and a country from where he can be located and identified like any human being. In fact, to be human is always to belong to somewhere, to exist at some time and to live in some place. Thus, Luke notes the birth of Jesus as a sign of a historical reality of the visit of God, and the witness to the fulfillment of God's plan.

At the center of the celebration of Christmas, there is a mystery, namely that God has become one of us. In Jesus, the ever-invisible God has taken flesh and become a human being like us. In Jesus, God has taken a human face and espoused human nature and history. Jesus is not only the son of Mary, but also the Son of God, the Savior; he is not only the prophet of Nazareth, but also Christ and Lord. From now on, we know that God has a face and a name. From now on, we know who God is for us and who we are for him.

Jesus is the light that the Father has sent in the world to enlighten our darkness. Whoever accepts God's light will never be lost. Jesus is God's gift to the world in order to bring us peace and joy. Whoever welcomes him and walks in his paths will have the peace of heart that surpasses any good someone can have in this life. Jesus is the Savior the Father has sent to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse us from our sins so that we become God's people, eager to do what is good in his presence.

If we want God's light and life to be manifested in us, as St Paul said in the second reading, we have to reject all godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this troubled age. We need to change our lives radically, to make them conform to the image of the One who has become

one of us so that we become part of him. We must give up all evil behavior that pushes us to choose sin and death instead of life. We must strive for justice and peace, to cling to honesty and sever ourselves from anything that prevents God's love to grow in us.

That is why the celebration of Christmas challenges us. As we gather together for the feast of the birth of Jesus, a question comes up again and again, "why are you here tonight?" "What difference does it make in your life to celebrate Christmas?" "After all, why another Christmas?" It is up to each one to answer personally and sincerely that question.

As Christians, we are here to celebrate the beginning of our redemption and the wonderful event of the incarnation of the Son of God in the world for our Salvation. As Christians we witness to the truth that, in spite of difficulties and conflicts crossing our world and our own lives, we are not alone; God is with us in his Son, Jesus Christ; he loves us. To know that God loves us and wants us to belong to him makes a difference in our lives. This gives us courage to confront the present and to hope for the future.

Christmas is not a celebration of a past event, but of an event that takes place today as we try hard to live in the spirit of Christ. Christmas leads us to the contemplation of the face of God in the child in the crib. In this night, there is a revelation of God who made himself poor, but there is also a revelation of a new world and a new humanity, a beginning of a new history between God and human beings.

Christmas is not an event of the past; it is an event that happens anytime we create a new world and a new humanity around us. Anytime we share with the needy, the abandoned, the refugees and the foreigners without jobs and resources, we witness to the truth of Christmas, that Jesus was born poor to make us rich in God. It is through our care that new world and the new humanity brought by Jesus can take place today.

Christmas invites us to the globalization, not that of economy and market, but that of heart, generosity and solidarity. Christmas invites us to get out of ourselves, to go toward others, not to be scared of others even if they are different from us. Let us open ourselves to the differences, for we are all equal before the crib. At Christmas, the joy and the peace of Christ are more compelling than prejudices that divide us. May we listen to the voice of wisdom the child in the crib is addressing us.

God has become one of us to share with us his life. He has given us proof of his love by becoming one of us. Let us respond to him with love and listen to his cry as he begs our love. Let us not miss the opportunity to welcome him in our hearts and to receive his peace tonight. Merry Christmas to all!



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