

Nativity of the Lord: Vigil Mass C/2012

The readings on this Christmas vigil describe the event of the birth of Jesus. They draw our attention to the fact that the birth of Jesus is the beginning of the redemption of the world and the fulfillment of God's plan to save us. They invite us, in particular, to celebrate this event with joy knowing that with the incarnation of Jesus in the world, our salvation has started.

The first reading of the book of Isaiah announces a change in the life of Israel after the return from exile. Israel will become a brilliant land at the sight of nations and kings. It will receive a new name given by God himself. Its destiny will change, because neither will the land be desolate or its inhabitants forsaken anymore. The Lord, God, will espouse the land, make Israel a glorious crown in his hand and rejoice in its midst.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is capable of changing human history by bringing it from defeat to victory, from sadness to joy. Another idea is the truth that where God is involved everything changes for the best for the good of his people.

This text allows us understanding of the core message of today's Gospel as it relates the birth of Jesus. First of all, the Gospel starts with the description of the genealogy of Jesus. It shows that, considering the unfolding of the history of Israel, Jesus Christ is a true descendant of David and of Abraham.

That is why the construction of the genealogy refers to the three main periods that depict the history of Israel, namely from Abraham to David, from David to the exile in Babylon, and from the return from exile in Babylon to the birth of Jesus.

The Gospel shows also that between each of these periods of history to which the genealogy refers, fourteen generations of people have been involved. It was at the end of the fourteenth generation of the last period of time that Jesus was born.

Finally, the Gospel relates the event of the birth of Jesus, how it took place. It shows that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was fiancée to Joseph. But before they lived together, Mary was found with a baby through the action of the Holy Spirit. When Joseph realized the gravity of the situation, he planned to drop Mary without necessarily putting her to shame.

At that time, the angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream and asked him not to do so. The angel explained to him the whole affair and requested that he give the name of Jesus to the baby once he was born. When Joseph, who was a righteous man, awoke he obeyed the injunction of the angel and took Mary his wife into his home.

The Gospel finishes by mentioning that all that happened in order to fulfill the prophecy made by the prophet Isaiah that a virgin will conceive and bear a son to whom they will give the name of Immanuel.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first point I want to bring is that Jesus Christ is the reason of the existence of human history. What do I mean by that? In fact, when I was reading the genealogy of Jesus, I was struck by the fact that, while history was unfolding from Abraham to David until the exile in Babylon, nobody knew what would be the end of its direction. But God knew, in his plan, that all that history had a purpose, namely that one day it would culminate in Jesus.

The same logic appears clearly behind the reasoning of St Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. In fact, St Paul seems to say that, since the choice of their ancestors, their sojourn in Egypt and the raising of David as king, God has prepared Jesus to be the fulfillment of his promise to give to Israel a savior. According to that reasoning, Jesus is the reason why the history of Israel was in the making. In that perspective, Christmas is the culmination of salvation history and the fulfillment of God's promise to his people.

We have, however, to remember that history contains three important moments, namely the past, the present and the future. We count these three moments according to human calendar, because it is for us human beings that there is a past, a present and a future. For God, on the contrary, everything is perpetually eternal. If God had an intention to save in the past, that intention remains true even today.

In that sense, the coming of Jesus in the world is the manifestation of God's intention to save us. It is that will of God to save us that we celebrate in the feast of Christmas. Christmas, then, is the celebration of the mystery of Jesus' coming into our world and his dwelling among us. From now on, we know that God is at the heart of our world; he is involved in our history and in our lives. Our history becomes his history; our life becomes his life, and our concerns become his concerns. The challenge we have at Christmas is to know if we will accept to let our personal history be transformed by God's history.

The second thing I want to highlight is that the birth of Jesus is the game changer of world history. In politics, when people talk about the game changer, they mean the important moment that makes the election change its course in favor of one or another candidate. The incarnation of Jesus Christ in the world is one of the greatest events that have changed forever the face of the universe. Before Jesus Christ, and after Jesus Christ, human history is not the same anymore. Something has changed for good, for us and for our world. We cannot live as though Jesus has never existed.

Christmas reminds us that we have to live not only according to human patterns, but also according to God's law. Anytime we try to separate God and human being, the divine and the human, we overlook the 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 worship of God; there is no true worship without the service of our fellow humans. The service of our fellow humans loses its meaning when it is not founded on the love God has revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Let us rejoice in this feast of our salvation with all men and women of good will. Let us call upon Jesus to bring peace to our world. Let us not miss the opportunity to make him our savior and Lord. Peace to you with whom we gather tonight; peace to your families and those you love in your hearts. God bless you all!

Isaiah 62: 1-5; Acts 13: 16-17, 22-25; Matthew 1: 1-25



Homily Date: December 24, 2012
© 2012 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20121224homily.pdf