

Christmas Mass During the Night B2023

"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 was 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.

Today! This "today" does not refer only to the event which took place two thousand years ago and which changed the history of the world. It also refers to this Holy Night in which we are gathered here in this Church and in spiritual communion with all our brothers and sisters throughout the whole world who celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus. Even in the farthest corners of the world resound tonight the words of the angel to the shepherds of Bethlehem: "Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy (...). A savior has been born for you, (...) Christ and Lord."

Jesus was born in a manger, as the Gospel of Luke recounts, "because there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7). Mary, his Mother, and Joseph had not found a welcome in any house in Bethlehem. Mary had to lay the Savior of the world in a stable, the only place available for the Son of God made man. This is the reality of the Lord's Nativity.

Why do we have to return every year to this event and all its details? We return to it so that we rediscover anew what God did for us for our salvation, and by rediscovering it, we realize that Christmas is not an event of the past. It is an event that takes place today in our hearts and in our families. If God cannot find a place in our hearts and in our families, Jesus will never be born again, within us. Our hearts and our families will resemble the inns of Bethlehem where there was no available room for Mary and Joseph so that Jesus might be born there.

"But to those who did accept him, St John says, he gave the power to become the children of God, to those who believe in his name. (John 1: 12)" The event of Jesus' birth has transformed the world and human history. Before Jesus, and after Jesus, human history is not the same anymore. Our life and our destiny are not the same anymore. While the whole human race expected the birth of Jesus with vague presentiment, the chosen people awaited it with explicit awareness.

Tonight the prophet Isaiah gives us a witness of that expectation from many distant centuries in the past, but enlightened by an inspired gaze. In a vision that transcends space and time, Isaiah looked at Bethlehem and said: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; upon his shoulders dominions rest. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace." (Is 9: 6-7) What a child imbued with mystery! What a Son wrapped in mystery! Who would approach him without realizing he is approaching God? He is fully human, but at the same time, he is fully God.

Saint Paul gives us also his witness. This is the witness of a one who met Jesus of the road to Damascus. He tells in the Letter to Titus that, the grace of God has appeared in human time for the salvation of all. It invites us to reject godless ways and worldly desires, to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age. It allows us to await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" who saved us by his death on the cross (Tit 2: 14).

With those two witnesses we realized that Jesus is the Messiah and the fulfillment of the promise of the Old Testament. In him, the Old Testament and the New Testament come together to form one block of the mystery of our salvation. Today, a savior has been born to us; a king has come for us. His birth reveals from the very start and beyond any doubt what the logic of God is like. God chooses poverty and weakness. God teaches us to discard the human logic based on power and force, logic that even some Christians are tempted to use.

Tonight we celebrate the feast of love 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 us human beings access to his divinity as he shares in our humanity. From now on, 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 we are created for God. Therefore, 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 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; there is no true adoration of God without service to our fellow human beings.

Our society has made Christmas a feast of family, an opportunity to exchange gifts and to meet friends and relatives. What a great blessing! But, let us not limit the celebration of Christmas to just that. Christmas is about God who loves human beings and wants to share in their lives. Christmas is about God who wants that human beings become divine. Tonight, let us listen to him and respond with love to his invitation.

Like the celebration of last year, this Christmas is overshadowed by the war in Ukraine, and the war between Israeli and Palestinians in the band of Gaza. For those who know that part of the world, when there is a tension in Gaza, life stops in Bethlehem. So, the birth place of the Prince of peace has become part of human conflict and political struggle. Let us pray for peace between these enemy brothers. Let us ask our Lord Jesus to bring peace to our world today. May his peace reign in our hearts and our families! May you all have a Blessed Christmas!

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



Homily Date: December 24, 2023
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20231224homily.pdf