

## Christmas Mass during the Night: The Nativity of the Lord C2024

*“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests”.*

That was the cry of joy and jubilation that the shepherds, the first witnesses of the birth of our Lord Jesus in Bethlehem, heard from the cohort of angels who announced to them the great news. As the angels surrounded the baby, they began by simply proclaiming the joy of seeing God’s glory manifested on earth as it is in heaven. That night the shepherds could not believe with their eyes that the promise made long time ago to their forefathers was fulfilled in their time: the savior has been born, Christ, the Lord.

If the promise was known and expected, its fulfillment surpassed every imagination. It was in a child that the savior has come. Why did God choose to be born? God made himself a child so that we may love him, so that we may dare to love him, and as a child trustingly lets himself be taken into our arms. It is as if God were saying: I know that my glory frightens you, and that you are trying to assert yourself in the face of my grandeur. So now I am coming to you as a child, so that you can accept me and love me.

The question that comes to mind is very simple: When someone tells another I love you, people often respond, “I love you too”. Tonight can you say to God, “I love you too”? If you say “yes”, then, what would be the consequence of your love of God in your life, in your family, in your business, in your Christian practice?

Look at what happened in Bethlehem as Mary and Joseph were looking for a place where to stay that night. The Gospel says that everywhere they went, there was no place to welcome them. In the end, as the baby was born, “(Mary) laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn”.

For sure the question that arises tonight is again very simple: What would happen if Mary and Joseph were to knock at your door. Would there be room for them? Tonight that question takes a deeper dimension with regard to our attitude toward the homeless, the refugees and the migrants. Do we really have room for God when he seeks to enter under our roof? Do we have time and space for him? Do we not actually turn away God himself?

We begin to do so when we have no time for him. Some among us here present come to Mass only at Christmas and Easter, sometimes too at the occasion of wedding, a baptism or a funeral. What do you say tonight? God does not want that we manifest our interest in him only at some occasions, but rather all the times, within the whole range of our life.

There is no room for him. Not even in our feelings and desires is there any room for God. We want ourselves; we want to be alone; we want to be independent. We want what we can seize hold of, we want happiness that is within our reach, we want our plans and purposes to succeed. We are so "full" of ourselves that there is no room left for God. And that means there is no room for others either, for children, for the poor, for the strangers.

Brothers and Sisters, we need a deep conversion of heart. We need to recover the vigor of our youth we have lost. We need to rediscover the love of our young age we have abandoned. The conversion that we need must truly reach into the depths of our relationship with reality. Let us ask the Lord that we may become vigilant for his presence, that we may hear how softly yet insistently he knocks at the door of our being and willing. Let us ask that we may make room for him within ourselves, that we may recognize him

also in those through whom he speaks to us: the children, the suffering, the abandoned, those who are excluded and the poor of this world.

Perhaps as I am speaking, the small spark of fire that is still in you pushes you to ask this question in your heart: "What to do, then, Brother? I cannot say more and more beautifully than by repeating St Paul in the second reading of tonight:

Because the grace of God has appeared in our time to save us, reject all godless ways and worldly desires. Live temperately, justly and devoutly in this age. Await patiently, but eagerly, the blessed hope and the appearance of the glory of our Great God and savior Jesus Christ. Because our Lord gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness, be of the people of his own, eager to do what is good.

On this Holy Night, God himself became man so that we share in his divinity. The name of the born Child is "Emmanuel", that is, God with us (Is 7:14). From now on, God shares his life with us. He is involved in our history and in our life. He does not leave us struggling alone, whatever might be the twists of our lives. He has come to bring his great light into our darkness, the darkness of sin. Let us follow his light so that we become godly people.

Let me finish by coming back to the shepherds. Once the angels departed, the shepherds said to one another: Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened for us (cf. Lk 2:15). In haste they went to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph and the infant lying in the manger. Like them, let us go to Bethlehem, where God is waiting for us. Let us ask the Lord to grant that we may overcome our limits, our world, to help us to encounter him, especially at the moment when he places himself into our hands and into our heart in the Holy Eucharist.

Let us go over to Bethlehem. As we say these words to one another, along with the shepherds, we should not only think of the great "crossing over" to the living God, but also of the actual town of Bethlehem and all those places where the Lord lived, ministered and suffered.

Let us pray at this time for the people who live and suffer there today. Let us pray that there may be peace in that land. Let us pray that Israelis and Palestinians may be able to live their lives in the peace of the one God and in freedom. Let us also pray for peace throughout the whole world: in Lebanon, Syria, Ukraine, Democratic Republic of the Congo. May there be peace for all the Christians in those lands where our faith was born so that Christians and Muslims may build up their countries side by side in God's peace. Amen!

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



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