

Homily for Midnight Mass

What a message we hear once again on this "O Holy Night". What a Mystery we contemplate yet again this Christmas! What a Gift we all receive from our Loving God and Father---the Gift of His Love for us thru His Son Jesus to be our Savior!

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great Light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom, a Light has shone.....For a Child is born to us, a Son is given us." So says the Prophet Isaiah, as we heard in this early morning's First Reading.

This morning's Psalm was even more powerful in it's message, and beautifully joyful with our Choir/and Brass proclamation: *"Today is born our Savior; Christ the Lord!"*

And our Gospel Reading, according to St. Luke, shared this world-changing, and life-altering, Good News in simple, understated fashion. After setting the stage of Joseph and the very pregnant Mary's nearly 100 mile journey from Nazareth, through the mountains, on foot, all the way to Bethlehem because of the Census throughout the Roman Empire, only to realize that they could find no lodging anywhere due to the overflowing crowds of people, St. Luke simply wrote: *"While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her Child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the Inn."*

If we all weren't waiting for it, we could easily miss the most important line in St. Luke's Gospel--- *Mary gave birth to her firstborn Son; she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes; she laid Him in a manger---the feeding trough used by animals---because (oh by the way), since there was no room for them in the Inn, Mary gave birth to her firstborn Son in a Stable.* St. Luke doesn't belabor that point. Mary gave birth to her first born Son, just like thousands of other mothers gave birth to their babies perhaps on that same night.

There may be nothing more ordinary than a baby being born; and yet, as we know, every birth is an extraordinarily amazing event. Just for the fun of it, I asked "Alexa" how many babies are born in the world every day. Do you know? She told me: 385,261 babies are born in the world each day---that's 140,620,260 babies a year! Of course, 2,000 years ago, in the Year "O", those numbers would be much lower, but the point that St. Luke was making is that, on the one hand, this Birth was like every other birth; but on the other hand, this Birth was like no other Birth in the history of humankind!

While no one in Bethlehem, with their Inns filled up with overflowing crowds, noticed or paid attention, that was not the case in the Fields of that region where shepherds were tending their flocks of Sheep. So, in the second part of tonight's Gospel Reading, St. Luke goes to great lengths to show us what "on the other hand" really means. All of a sudden, in the middle of the night---at Midnight---St. Luke paints this incredibly dramatic scene: *There were shepherds in that region living in the fields....They were keeping the night watch over their flock....An Angel of the Lord appeared to them, and first of all, wanted to calm them by saying: 'Do not be afraid!' Then, the Angel gave them this earth-shattering message, saying: "For behold, 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!"....And suddenly, not just one Angel, but a "multitude of the Heavenly Host" appeared, praising God and singing the original Christmas Carol: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests."* On the one hand, St. Luke treats the actual event of Jesus' Birth very ordinarily; but on the other

hand, the proclamation of this Good News receives an extraordinarily special “Cecil B. Demille” (or more currently) a “Steven Spielberg” production!

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, this is Christmas! However old you are, that’s how many Christmases you’ve celebrated. I would venture to say that in our Faith, there’s nothing more familiar to us than the Story of this Event that brings us together in the middle of the night--at THIS Midnight hour----to celebrate this ancient, but always new, Solemnity of Christmas. And as familiar as we are with this Story as told by St. Luke, and as re-told by writers of precious variations of this story that we read over and over, and by the composers of treasured Christmas Carols and Hymns that we can’t sing often enough, even after singing them 1,000 times, this Christmas Story----this earth-shattering, historic, life-changing account----remains for us a Mystery. Listen again to the Angel’s Good News: You will find an infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger---in an animal food box (which, of course, is a prefigurement of Jesus’ Gift of Himself to us to be our Spiritual Food in the Holy Eucharist)---in a Stable among the poorest of the poor, and the neediest of the needy----and this Infant is your Savior---this Infant is your Christ, the Anointed One----this Infant is your Lord, the Almighty One!

Yes, Christmas is ancient, but always new; Christmas is more familiar to us than perhaps our own family history, but remains for us an incomprehensible Mystery. But we are here, my dear Family of Faith, because we Believe! And however many Christmases you, or I, have celebrated thus far in our lives, THIS Christmas finds us anew!

So, what does Christmas mean to you today?----this year?----at this time in your life?

Isaiah talked about “*the people who walked in darkness*”. Is there any “*darkness*” in your life? Is there any part of our lives that feels like “*a land of gloom*”? It feels like there’s a lot of “darkness” in the world these days. It feels like the world has never been as anxious/tense/worried as it seems to be these days. It feels like our country is divided deeply over differences of opinion. It feels like our Church is experiencing the “gloom of mistrust” with the Church’s leaders, and a loss of faith among the members, and a time of division within the Body of Christ, Whose Birth we are here to celebrate! But Isaiah’s ancient answer remains ever new, and just as true, for us today: “*A great Light*” is shining for those who are in darkness, who are divided, who are worried, for those untrusting, for those whose faith is weakened----This *Great Light* offers to bring us “*abundant joy and great rejoicing*”; this *Great Light* smashes the yokes, the poles, and the rods that burden or oppress us. This “*Great Light*” IS that “*Child born to us; the Son given to us; the One named “Prince of Peace”*”.

Or let’s think this Christmas about how we might be like those thousands of pilgrims who were crowding all the Inns and Hotels and Resting Places in Bethlehem. When Joseph went from Inn, to Hotel, to private home, pleading for a room---any room---so that his pregnant wife could have a safe and sanitary place to give birth to their Child, Joseph wasn’t rejected out of hostility, so much as that there just was no room.

Could that be a commentary on our world? On our country? On our Church? Even, on our own lives---and our own hearts??? While there are some people, and perhaps a growing number of people, who are hostile toward the practice of Religion, and toward people of Faith, perhaps the worst danger of all is Apathy, or shall we call it “Busy-ness”. I don’t reject Jesus; I just don’t have “room” for Him in my life right now. I’m far too busy with School. I’m too tied up with Sports. I’m way too heavily weighed down with my two jobs and other responsibilities. I just don’t have time. Maybe some time; but not now! Isn’t that our modern-day version of how it was that Mary and Joseph had to make do with the poorest, least sanitary, most dangerous

setting of all to give Birth to the Child Who came to bring Light to those in darkness; to the Infant Who is our Savior—our Christ---our Lord?!

But, dear Friends, what if we all made room in our hearts? What if we all allowed the Light of Christ to dispel the darkness and gloom that we might be in? What if we opened our ears and our hearts to hear the Good News of great Joy proclaimed in the original Christmas Carol: “*Glory to God in the highest*”? It seems to me that that would make THIS Christmas, of all the Christmases that we’ve celebrated thusfar in our lives, the happiest, the most joyful, and the merriest Christmas of all time.

That, my dear Family of Faith, is my prayer for all of you on this Christmas 2019---to wish you, and all your loved ones, the happiest, most joyful and the merriest Christmas ever. And when you take time to gaze upon the Manger Scene today, or in the next few days to come----- this Manger Scene here in our Cathedral, or the one you have at home---allow yourself to feel the Gift that Jesus came to bring us: the Gift of unconditional Love. Take the time to hear Jesus tell you that He loves you not because you’re so perfect, or so good; He loves you because you’re you. And I hope you will take time to tell Jesus that you love Him too; ask Him to allow His Light to shine in you; ask Him to help you to clear out the clutter, and remove the distractions and sinful habits that you may have allowed to take hold, so that you can make room for Him in your heart, not just at Christmas, but every day of every year, and of every Christmas still to come.

When we make room for Jesus in our hearts and in our lives, and when we allow the Light of His Love to dispel the darkness that sin’s hold can have within us, then we too will proclaim with the Angels the prayer we can pray for ourselves, for our country, our Church and the entire world: “*May there be Peace on Earth to those on whom Jesus’ Favor rests.*”

God bless you, now and always!