

Christmas Day C 2024

On Christmas Eve we heard the wonderful story of Jesus' birth from Luke's Gospel—the account of a baby in a stable, of shepherds, and angels in the town of Bethlehem. This is the narrative from one of the four Gospel accounts, the four versions of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

How do the other three accounts of the events of Jesus' birth compare?

The earliest is Mark, whose story begins with the preaching of John the Baptist and which totally ignores the birth and childhood of Jesus. The next is Matthew, who gives us the account of the star and King Herod and the visit to the manger of the Wise Men with their three gifts. Then next is Luke who doesn't mention the Kings but mentions the Shepherds.

The fourth account is the one we hear in today's Gospel, from the Evangelist John. John condenses the story into one simple phrase: "The word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." What a different view this is from the detailed stories of Luke and Matthew.

John has no specifics like them — no manger or shepherds or kings. The view of Matthew and Luke is more like a close up photograph, but John's account has no such details. It is a picture taken from a distance with a very wide-angle lens.

Luke and Matthew give a view that is in microcosm — as if seen under a microscope, if you will. But John's view is a macrocosm — as if the event were seen through a telescope. Matthew and Luke tell a very local story. John gives the cosmic context.

John give us this bigger picture to show us what God had done and is doing in the whole world—now and always, not just in that tiny corner of the Earth long ago. John gives us a view of how God moves in the hearts and lives of human beings. This is a truth assuring us that God in Christ is not a stranger to human beings but our eternal companion. This is how God was made known to us. Jesus is the human face of God.

The Incarnation — God's becoming human — is the truth by which we find God. As we look at the story of Jesus' birth in Luke and Matthew, we might ask, "What is the point of these birth stories? What is the point of the shepherds and the angels and the Wise Men?"

The essential answer is that Jesus is a flesh and blood person - just like us - just like every human being. This is a reminder of God's initiating the relationship with us - God's movement toward us - of God's choosing us. This is God coming into our world and into the midst of our lives - each of us - whoever and wherever we may be.

John's Gospel account that we hear today is the story of how God became human so that we might know how to be truly human; so the Incarnation, this God becoming human, can serve as an invitation for us to become the very children of God. John moves us from the wonder of the Christmas story, from the specific details of the birth in Bethlehem, to the bigger picture, so we may move from the specifics of our lives to the broader view of God's creation.

And for that creation, this Christ born to us and for us, is the light that illumines all: a light wider than any wide-angle lens can capture; a light that shines away all the darkness that evil forces can mass against us.

It is fitting that light plays a part in our celebration today, because it is the light above all that symbolises Jesus Christ. If you have ever known a fear of the dark; possibly as a child; if you have ever suffered depression; if you have lived through a war, or some disaster, or even if you are anxious sometimes with the news you hear of violence terror and war and world crises of one sort or another- then you will have known what it is like when light appears. Your fear is dispelled and there is hope that peace can be found and the darkness of depression is lifted. To have seen darkness in one's life, even once, enables us to know how good the light can be. The opening words of our Gospel of John touch a familiar chord: "In him was life, and that life was the life of mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never mastered it." (JN 1:4-5). We know how it feels, and our hearts lift up.

And so today we rejoice together because the real light has come. The one light that can change the hearts of men and women; the light that can take away sin and selfishness; the light that really does give hope to every human being- the light of Christ. And when we think of it, we recognise that sin is at the heart of the divisions among people and races. It is selfishness that channels God's good gifts into armaments and instruments of war, terror and violence. It is pride and corruption that so often prevent us from being able to solve the world's problems of hunger and poverty. And it this sin, selfishness, pride and corruption, which makes our world a dark and fearful place. Jesus comes today to change our hearts. He wants to give us a new sense of priorities. He will turn many of our accepted values upside down. Some may say "Your message has wonderful promise for us all, but where is the great person who delivers it? "Where is Jesus today?" The answer is simple -we just don't look with eyes that see and ears that hear- we are so deafened by the white noise and roar of this world, so blinded by the neon flashing lights and alluring distractions.

Then, on this day when we can pause and stop and think again we reflect on the great prologue of John and remember and are reminded of the truth, that Jesus is present among us now, in this world- even before the world began, in the scriptures and in this sacrament of the Eucharist- present in those around us. In fact if we know where to look and how to listen we will find him all around us and in us and through us every day.

On this great day for the world we are called to reflect on how the Jesus story all began. Did Jesus burst upon the world in splendour and triumph? No he came as a baby, with nothing and that is what is so remarkable- for when we look at our humble crib scene- it is a simple child like picture- with infinite significance and importance. Jesus came as a baby because he wanted to turn our worldly standards upside down. He came as a baby because a baby needs loving, not admiration, or respect or acknowledgement, or even credibility- just love. He came with nothing except a body that needed nourishment if it was to survive at all, and a heart that needed loving, if it was to grow. Jesus came to share the needs of every human being, so that we might learn the needs of every human being. As Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons in the 2nd Century put it: "The word of God, Jesus Christ, on account of his great love for mankind, became what we are in order to make us what he is himself."

He needed love and so do we. The fact is that we might never have known the infinite depth and breadth and humanness of God's love, if his Son had come in any other way. In the needs of a baby- we learn the needs of God. In the Christ child we see our own weakness and need for God

ourselves. When we come to think of it we have so much to thank God for this Christmas, let us thank him for taking us as we are, and showing us what he wants us to be.

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