

Nativity of the Lord (Vigil)

December 24, 2023

Merry Christmas everyone! Merry Christmas! That phrase might sound as a kind of throwaway line, a cliché, if you will. But I mean it sincerely.

Merry Christmas! It brings me so much joy to be able to gather with you this holy day, and I hope that same joy finds a place in your heart, despite the busyness and chaos and pressures that often come with this time of year.

And quite honestly, I can kind of see it on your faces, that glimmer in your eyes of something special taking place, something meaningful, memories being made that hopefully will last a lifetime.

It is a good and holy thing we do this day as we come together to give thanks to God for the greatest gift of all, a gift first given two thousand years ago, yet a gift we can in a very real sense “unwrap” for the first time this very day. You see, the same Jesus who was born over two thousand years ago is the exact same Jesus who comes to us every time our hearts are open to him, particularly during this season of grace and miracle.

My dear friends, indeed what we are celebrating this night is really quite astounding if you think about it. And that’s the key - thinking about and contemplating what this night really means. We’re so familiar with it that it’s easy for us to accept it without hanging on to the wonder of it all, without marveling at the mystery of it all, without having a true appreciation for what our God has done for you and me. What could possibly make our God want to . . . become one of us?

I am certainly not going to stand here and say that I know what is in the mind of God. God is God and unfortunately we are not. Yet, reflecting on the Incarnation can help us understand a little more about God . . . and a little more about ourselves. God could have made an infinite number of other choices, but he chose THIS way, and THESE circumstances and THIS moment in history. And there is nothing random about it, nothing

accidental. This was God's loving plan and that means it is the best plan, the best way, the best for us and for the world. What a God we have!

But why THIS way? What are we to make of it all? Well, for one thing, the fact that God came to us as a helpless child to a family of no status or power, shows us that our God is a God of gentleness, not a God of force. He's a God of humility, not a God of arrogance. He's a God who doesn't want to be distant, but wants to be close.

He's a God who is not disinterested, but who is profoundly concerned with his creation - profoundly concerned with you and with me. My dear friends, our God is an incredibly caring God, one willing to do absolutely anything and everything to lead us where we need to be, heal our every wound, dry every tear and forgive every sin. What a God we have!

I could go on and on. You see, the birth of Jesus doesn't reveal just ONE thing about God, it illuminates for us so much of that which had been in darkness for so long. In other words, the Light that has come into the world shines his radiant light on us and all of creation, but also, in a sense, shines it on himself, helping humankind to see God in a whole new light, in a whole new way, from a whole new perspective. God is so much more than we could ever think of or imagine. Christmas shows that loud and clear. What a God we have!

And if I had to try to sum up these holy mysteries in one phrase (which is not easy) I'd probably say that when God became one of us in the person of Jesus, he changed absolutely everything. Nothing would ever be the same. The birth of Jesus was a turning point, a pivot, a life-changing and world-changing reversal of the highest order.

Humanity had been on one path, and Jesus altered that path forever. The world had been repeating a pattern of disobedience, Jesus would be perfectly obedient. The world had too often given in to selfishness, Jesus would be selfless. The world could not keep itself from turning on each

other. Jesus would show us how to live, how to give and most importantly, how to love.

Yes, God became part of his creation and creation was never the same again. That means that God became one of us in the hope that we would never be the same either. He became like us, so that we could be like him. Imagine that.

That means that, when God plunged himself right into our human history, into our world in the most profound, intimate way possible, when God chose to be born of Mary, he did so not simply to reverse the course of human history. I believe He did so precisely so that the exact same thing could happen in every human heart open to him, open to his love, open to his grace and his mercy.

My dear friends, God changed the world when he entered our world, when His Son was born. Will we now allow him to change us?

That's the real miracle, allowing Jesus to be born again in each of us, so that people everywhere can still experience him and experience his blessings through us. And so, as we lovingly reflect on the beautiful story of Christmas, as we gratefully reflect on the tiny baby Jesus lying in a manger, let's never forget the manger he really wants to lie in, the one in you and my heart and indeed in every human heart.

So let's make room for him, and by so doing change the world.

I'm praying and hoping that each of us has the holiest, happiest, and the most meaningful Christmas ever. And the merriest too.