

Homily for Christmas  
December 25, 2017  
Fr. Thomas Joseph

Today we celebrate the most decisive moment in the salvation history, the birth of the savior. The long waiting for the promised savior has come to an end. The “forsaken” humankind is brought forth to the land of light. The true Sun that is going to light up the sky for the future generations till the end of the world is rising in the horizon. As the prophet Isaiah says, “You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; ---- And they shall be called the holy people, The redeemed of the Lord.” (Is 62/4, 12)

As we remember the greatest salvific acts of God in the incarnation of Jesus, we have to go deep into the mysteries that are involved. The passage that is chosen for our reflection is from the Gospel of Luke. He wants to tell us that the birth of Jesus is not an isolated event, but a historical one in the plan of God for the whole world. But how the drama unfolds itself is beyond normal concepts of safety and comforts.

Jews expected a savior who would be born in a palace as the son of a king. He would be the mightiest one bringing redemption to His chosen people. The savior who was born as a helpless child in a stable near a wayside inn without being attended by anybody was beyond their comprehension. He did not meet the expectation of the people. Let us for a moment put aside all the catechism and the religious explanations which we are taught and look at Jesus in a totally different way. Let us ask ourselves the question: would we be able to accept a child born in a similar circumstance as our savior? The answer is a big No. Divine intervention in human context are sometimes beyond our understanding. When we go through it we may not be able to accept it or realize that God is working in our life. But the plan of God is being executed in our daily life through ways that are incomprehensible to our limited human wisdom and intelligence.

In Jesus, God comes into our lives in a way far from splendor and glitter or frightening and awe. He comes as a child vulnerable and helpless “wrapped in swaddling clothes” and laid in a manger. There are no servants around, no kings, no one to assist. A pathetic scene of birth indeed! God is stooping to the bottom of his self-emptying to be one with humans. As St. John puts it, “he came to his own”. When there is love we tend to do anything for the sake of our beloved. God considered us “His own”. So, he takes up the task of abandoning his heavenly bliss and coming down to the level of the lowest of the lowly. It is so that no one can shy away from the fruits of his incarnation. As he is born among the lowly and the poorest as a refugee in someone else’s land, in someone else’s stable on the wayside, no one needs to be afraid of approaching him. He becomes accessible to all.

That is something we find so special in Christmas: God becoming accessible and tangible to the poorest of the poor. Without fear and trembling the forsaken of the abandoned shores can claim access to him. Here is someone who understands the pangs of their daily existence. This is clearly exemplified by what follows the birth of Jesus. The message of his birth is sent not to the palace of Herod or Quirinius or Caesar, but to the poor shepherds shivering in the winter night in the open fields of Bethlehem. Jesus is born for the people who need him most.

Isaiah's prophecy announces the rising of a great light which breaks through the night. This light is born in Bethlehem and is welcomed by Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. The angels announced the sign for the shepherds: "You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger". This sign is the humility of God taken to the extreme; it is the love with which He assumed our frailty, our suffering, our anxieties, our desires and our limitations. The message conveyed through Christmas is nothing but the tenderness of God; God who looks upon us with eyes full of love and who accepts our poverty; God who is in love with our smallness.

Long ago, there was a wise and good King who loved his people. He wanted to know how they lived and he wanted particularly to know about their hardships. He often dressed in the clothes of a worker or a beggar, and visited the homes of the poor. Nobody recognized him. Once he visited a very poor man who lived in a cellar. He ate the food the poor man ate, and he spoke cheerful, kind words to him and left. Later when he visited the poor man again, he disclosed his identity saying, "I am your King." Then the king thought the man would surely ask for some gift or favor, but he did not.

Instead the poor man said, "You left your palace and your glory to visit me in this dark, dreary place. You ate the food I ate. You brought gladness to my heart. To others you have given rich gifts. But to me you have given yourself."

This is the true meaning of Christmas: **"For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man". God gave Himself to us.**

We all have wonderful memories of how we have celebrated Christmas: the Joy and excitement of opening Christmas presents; sampling the delicious foods and deserts that our mothers and grandmothers prepared; decorating the tree; setting up the manger scene; singing Christmas carols; and of course, gathering together with family members and friends.

Most of our memories of Christmas are beautiful indeed; however, many people have memories of Christmas past permeated with sadness, times of difficulty and distress.

Why does terrible evil exist in the world? Why doesn't God put an end to it? This world is not a fantasy world as if we were immersed in a movie. God does not fly around like Super Man or like

a wizard stopping bad things from happening. The Gospel tells us that the wheat and the weeds grow together. God respects our freedom and many times our choices are bad.

Evil exists; bad things happen precisely because man rejects God. Our modern times are marked by a general rejection of God which causes the terrible chaos that we see each day. If we are away from God, we become incapable of recognizing ourselves as sinful creatures in need of redemption. We need to open our minds and our hearts and allow the savior to possess our entire being. Pope Benedict XVI wrote: **“The birth of Christ challenges us to re-assess our priorities, our values, our very way of life. While Christmas is undoubtedly a time of great joy, it is also an occasion for deep reflection, even as an examination of conscience”**.

Christmas is the celebration of the Presence of God among us. His name is Emmanuel, a name that means “God is with His people.” He is with us, right here, right now, and forever. He is not a spiritual entity hidden in the great unknown of infinity. He is the One with whom we can establish a divine relationship. Mankind needs the physical presence of His Love to celebrate His Life within us. Christmas is the celebration of the Presence of God as one of us. The miracle of Christmas is the infinite depth of God’s Love for each of us.

Together with the shepherds, let us pause before the Child in silence. Together with them, let us thank the Lord for having given Jesus to us, and with them let us raise from the depths of our hearts the praises of his fidelity: We bless you, Lord God most high, who lowered yourself for our sake. You are immense, and you made yourself small; you are rich and you made yourself poor; you are all-powerful and you made yourself vulnerable.

On this day let us share the joy of the Gospel: God loves us, he so loves us that he gave us his Son to be our brother, to be light in our darkness.