

Homily for Christmas Eve
December 24, 2017
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My brothers and sisters of every age A Happy and Holy Christmas to all of you! Advent is over and now we come together to celebrate the Birth of Jesus Our Lord and Savior. The stable of Bethlehem helps us to imagine how Mary and Joseph were the first people to see and hold the Son of God. The first visitors to the stable were shepherds, humble people who took care of the animals who lived around the stable. They heard heavenly music from the angels who came to announce the holy birth of the Christ Child.

How different was our birth in time! Most of us were born in hospitals or maybe at home with midwives. When baby Jesus was born in the dark and cool night, he was laid in the rough manger – a feed channel for donkeys, cattle, and sheep. Poor people from the area followed the angels' voices which led them to the manger. It must have been a strange and wondrous sight – shepherd folk visiting the One who one day would call Himself "The Good Shepherd". It is also important to remember that the Little Lord Jesus was greeted by poor shepherds, including little children.

I also want to remind our children that –as the Christmas season continues -- other figures will come into the manger – people from distant places – bearing gifts for Jesus the newborn King of the Jews. They too were led by signs in the heavens – they came in search of this infant King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Yes, my dear friends – take time after Mass and throughout this Christmas Season – Come to the Creche of Bethlehem. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you imagine and appreciate the truth and beauty of Christmas – the day when God's Son came to us in the flesh and shared His love, peace, and mercy with us and with the whole world.

Today our hearts are filled with joy and happiness because the promise has been fulfilled. Today the Son of God is born. The Savior of the world comes to partake of our human nature. We are no longer alone and forsaken. Today the true light has come to illumine our lives so often beset by the darkness of sin.

Today the real path to Bethlehem is open for us. We must put away all fear and dread. There is no room for doubt and indifference. We are not permitted to stand idle. The mystery of truth is revealed to us today. A Child has been born to us; A Child has been given to us. Now every man and woman to share in this Joy is given the mission of making known "The Prince of Peace" and becoming His effective servants in the midst of all nations. All sadness has been banished, for the Child Jesus brings true comfort to every heart.

Now this Child teaches us what is truly essential to our lives. So, let us be silent and let the Child speak to us. Let us take his words to our heart. He was born into the poverty of this world. There

was no room for Him and his family in the Inn. He found shelter in a stable and was laid in a manger for animals. This Child whose face radiates the goodness, mercy and love of God the Father, trains us, his disciples, to reject “Godless ways” and the riches of the world and to live justly and devoutly.

Our society is often intoxicated by consumerism and pleasure-seeking, wealth and luxury, appearances and self-admiration. Child Jesus calls us to act in a way that is simple, balanced, consistent, capable of seeing what is essential. The world we live in is too lenient to sin where we need to cultivate a strong sense of justice and truthfulness. We need to discern the will of God.

Today, in the Gospel, we see God actively involving Mary and Joseph in to the redemptive mysteries. And throughout the history, we see God inviting people to be the part of the salvation history: Abraham, Moses, David, Prophets and many others take part in the mission of God and preparing the people for God.

In the story of Christmas, we see angels, Mary and Joseph, shepherds and the Kings from the East taking part in the Christmas Event. Now it is our turn. God needs each and every one to partake in this event. He needs our help as priests, religious, and exemplary lay people to continue his mission in this world.

I wish to end this reflection with the opening words of Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he states: “The Joy of the Gospel fill the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept the offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, Joy is constantly born anew.”