

Homily - The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas 2023)

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

The silence of that night was broken by the joyful song of the angels:

Jesus Christ is born.

Despite all of the angelic fanfare, very few people realize that this was the night that prophets and sages had longed for through the centuries of anticipation.

Their Messiah was now living among them, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laying in a manger.

They didn't know it yet... but in time, they would.

Just like the birth of any new child, Christ's entry into the world would bring about profound change and transformation - it would shake lives, even on a cosmic level.

I've thought about that human experience a few times as I've looked around the parish in recent months.

You may have noticed, for instance, that we've been seeing more than a few new faces in the pews, and some of them are very small.

Growth, whether in a family, in a parish, or in our soul, is often a noisy, disruptive process in many ways.

And yet, that disruption is a sign of joy for those who have ears to hear.

Jesus Christ is disrupting our lives in the most beautiful way as he breaks into the solitude and spiritual isolation that we often choose for ourselves, and he challenges us to respond to his love with a similar energy and fervor.

Ask any new parent about the experience of bringing home a new baby, and you'll know it can often be a bumpy road.

Like a mother and father adjusting to a new life in the midst of their family, when Our Lord invites us on a journey of conversion, we may find it hard at times, even overwhelming and confusing.

These changes are surprising and unexpected even as they are joyful.

We may be shocked by how much we have to set aside that used to be a normal part of our lives.

We may find that we don't have space for many of the more superficial things that used to be significant, even central to how we lived, and now left behind to attend to a much more important need.

But when compared to the joy of the new life growing and thriving within our homes, those sacrifices are small things in the end.

Our Lord's Incarnation encompasses all of that, and more.

That experience of Christmas, we know, wasn't merely a long-ago historical event.

The beauty of the liturgy, the prayer of the Church, is that in a mysterious way, we are re-living that joy in a real way even today.

In the Eucharist itself, the Body and Blood of Christ, Jesus is present with us just as truly as he was present in the manger of Bethlehem.

For us to really appreciate the joy of Christmas, we, like the shepherds, will need to listen and reflect on the Lord's message, and understand why this is a message of joy for us specifically.

It all begins with contemplation - recognizing that God is with us, and that he is truly present in a unique way in his Church, no matter how humble the parish or how simple the Mass.

This is the reason for our prayers of adoration and thanksgiving, and the need to spend real time in silence before the face of God, so that we can allow that truth to sink in and shape our minds, wills, and hearts.

As we journey with him and ponder his words and actions in our hearts, the truth of who he is and the mission he has for our lives will become clear.

From there, the Lord will invite us to share that good news, as he always does.

And like a newborn infant breaking through the peace and order of a home, he will inevitably push us out of our comfort zone and onto the path of a new life.

I can tell you this with absolute certainty: if you can look back on your year and say that Jesus Christ hasn't shaken up your life recently, that's the surest sign that we need to pray more.

That's how he works - sending his Spirit into us as a beautiful, joyful, often chaotic catalyst for new life and a new experience of divine love.

And when he invites us to act, don't be afraid if you feel like you don't have much to offer.

Like Jesus, we have to begin from the manger, a place of poverty and simplicity.

God himself will provide the graces, the charisms, the help, the virtues, and the support we need to follow his will, no matter where it leads us.

But all of that will come in time.

For now, we remain with the shepherds and angels in the humility of Bethlehem, kneeling before the King of Kings in his perfect simplicity.

Let us come and adore him in faith and trust, and give thanks for the birth of our Savior, Emmanuel, God with us.