

## The Nativity of the Lord

December 25, 2018

Isaiah 62:1-5  
Acts 13:16-17, 22-25  
Matthew 1:1-25

Isaiah 9:1-6  
Titus 2:11-14  
Luke 2:1-14

Isaiah 52:5-10  
Hebrews 1:1-6  
John 1:1-18

Once again, I extend a heartfelt welcome to all of you, our visitors, our parishioners, and our many friends who have joined us for this holy day. We have been gathered in to celebrate the birth of Christ and to once again welcome the gift of God's love into our lives. Once we open our eyes and recognize Christ Jesus, as we believe and know the presence of Christ Jesus, God is no longer hidden, detached, or distant. The gift of a new born always brings a spirit of hope, the gift of Christ Jesus brings us a deep and abiding spirit of confidence and assurance. As troubled as the church is right now, as troubled as the world is, as troubled as your family might be, the birth of Christ can assure us that we do not journey alone.

Recently, I read a commentary that suggested that we ought "to give Christmas back to the ones whom it really belongs: the homeless, the refugees, the elderly, the sick, the hopeless young people, those with disabilities, all of whom are so often discarded like our cast-off-Christmas wrappings." As I turned that suggestion around in my mind and imagination, I found myself agreeing, Christmas does indeed belong to these folks. But something was nagging at me, as I have always understood Christ was given for all the human family. I am truly aware that these identified very much deserve and yearn for the birth of Christ, and I would like to help give them assurance that Christ is near to them. And yet, where does that leave the rest of us?

Over the years there have been many artistic depictions of the Nativity. One by an unknown sixteenth century Flemish artist, entitled *The Adoration of the Christ Child*, is now in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. Behind Mary, Joseph, and the Christ Child kneel two angels who are easily recognizable as having what we now call Down syndrome, a condition not defined until the mid 1800s by John Langdon Down. They are perfectly at home there in the manger, just as the shepherds and all the poor.

The many depictions of Nativity began with what we find today's gospel passage from Luke. Christ entered this world at a most vulnerable place. Without adequate shelter, without the assistance of women familiar with child birth, God entrusts his Son into the arms, into the lives of the poor and discarded. While the high and mighty were concerned about an accurate census to support their wealthy lifestyles, the birth is announced by the angel to the shepherds. Once they overcame their fear, the shepherds hurry to the place, and once they see they are convinced that what they have been told is true. And so, from the beginning, sacred scripture tells us that Christmas does indeed belong to the poor and discarded.

Even though most of us would not fall into the category of the discarded, we have some thing to learn from these, our brothers and sisters. They have an emptiness, they know that they are in need, and thus, they have something to teach us about faith, hope and love. Those who struggle to survive from day to day are present in the sacred word, they are present each day on our television screens and in the news, they are present on our streets, perhaps in our classrooms and workplaces. To the extent that we can relate to these individuals, feel their plight and experience, they can teach us about the incredible gift the human family receives this day.

So many folks struggle with the idea, that there is anything to be gained by being vulnerable. The veterans I work with are quick to walk away from the idea. "You leave yourself open and they take advantage. You let your guard down and they can hurt you. You trust and they betray you and you look like a fool." And yet, a vulnerable child tells us God is near. This child born into the poverty of the world blesses the poor and discarded with incredible joy and hope, and thus blesses each of us.

I would suggest that our call as members of Christ is to be one with the poor, the disabled, the elderly, the young person in despair, so that through us the love of God might find its way into this human family. A vulnerable child urges us to become a vulnerable people, to recognize there is an emptiness at the deepest part of each of our lives. When God senses that we are aware of that empty place deep in the soul, God cannot resist but to enter in and reside there. To make room in the heart, to be vulnerable, is to be ready for the greatest joy, peace, and assurance. The sadness, the difficult relationships, the moments that challenge will come from time to time, yet we will manage them with a renewed sense of confidence.

Within the setting of God's sacred word, around the table of Eucharist, and surrounded by family and friends we begin the Christmas Season! May God bless us all!

