

**Christmas Night**  
**(Isaiah 9:1-7 / Titus 2:11-14 / Luke 2:1-14)**  
**24.12.2013**

The Christ event which we celebrate in the Christmas mystery did not just happen *once upon a time*. It should not be relegated to a bygone era. It is not to be confined to two thousand years ago. The Christ event which we celebrate in the Christmas mystery (the mystery of the incarnation) is lived unceasingly in time. It is actual. It is actuality. It is *news*. It is the *Good News* of this night! The Christ event, the Christmas mystery, is an on-going reality. It is something we are called to experience tonight.

God continually takes on our human flesh!

God takes flesh in humanity with every new life that is born into the world. He desires to become incarnate, and He engages Himself to do so, in every age and generation, in every human life ... in your life and in mine.

In Christ Jesus *God is with us*.

Not only is He *with us*, He is *within us*.

By the grace of our Christian baptism *we are Christ!*

That is a strong statement, you might think. It is a strong statement! It is what the Church believes. Christ is as present in you and in me as He is in the sacrament of the altar.

If we are Christ, what are we if not *God's word made flesh*?  
Certainly, that is what we are called to be.

No wonder then that the Fathers of the Church could cry out saying: *Christian/Christians be aware of your nobility!*

Our Eastern brothers and sisters are not shy to say that the ultimate goal of the Christian life is *divinisation*.

Understand me. When I say *divinisation* is our *ultimate goal*, let's not take that to mean that *divinisation* is our ultimate goal in the sense of being something we are called to only at the end of time.

We must be careful not to defer the *realisation* of our vocation to some far off moment, thinking of it as something we will never arrive at in our earthly lifetime.

It is already here and now in our earthly existence that we are called to at least begin to realise the *divinisation* which is our ultimate calling.

Yes, it is here and now, in our earthly life, that we are called to become one with God.

Christmas should be about God becoming flesh in our lives today: it should be about His becoming flesh in us in this celebration, at the heart of this holy night ... so that we may become one with Him!

Without articulating things as I have just stated them, I think we know intuitively that God becomes flesh in every infant born into the world.

Do parents of a new-born child not recognise this truth when they first hold their baby in their arms?

I would suggest that they do recognise this truth intuitively.

I would suggest that they feel divine life to be present in their little child.

And I think they also know intuitively that they themselves have participated in God's creative work

when they hold their new-born infant, the fruit of their love, in their arms for the first time.

I know many parents who would say that when they contemplated with marvel the wonderful gift God gave them in their new born child what they experienced at that moment was of deep spiritual significance.

They felt God was there!

Of course, each one of us came into this world as a little child.

I imagine that we too will have evoked marvel in others.

I would go on to say that we should still evoke marvel in ourselves.

With the psalmist we should be able to pray: *I marvel in awe at your ways ... I thank you for the wonder of my being.*

We all were, and we all still are, God's gift.

We are not just the fruit of our parents' coming together. We are also, and before all else, the fruit of God's love.

Ultimately it is God who is our origin.

In the first place it is God's love which brought us into being.

In God's design none of us is an accident, no matter what the circumstances of our conception and/or of our birth.

How reassuring for us to know these things: especially those of us whose experience of family has not always been a good one or an easy one.

We must remember that we were all of us brought into being by the Lord of love for life: to live our lives in love.

Each one of us is made in God's image and likeness.

We are, each one of us, a reflection of God ... and not only a reflection of God, we are all part of Him: we are an extension of His being!

And so it befalls us to give flesh to the Lord in our lives.

How do we do this?

We do this by living our lives according to His word.

*The Word became flesh and lived among us.*

This statement stands at the heart of our Profession of Faith.

Tonight we are invited to fall to our knees as we sing those words in the course of the Creed – just as the shepherds fell to their knees when they came to pay homage to the Christ-child in Bethlehem.

The Word becomes flesh in you and in me to the extent that we accept to live our lives as Christ lived His.

How did Christ live His life?

He lived His life always saying *Yes* to God.

He lived His life always doing the Father's will.

In the Letter to the Hebrews we read how Christ came into this world saying: *Yes ... Behold I come to do Your will.*

Just as Christ came into the world saying *Yes! Behold I come to do your will*, so we are called to say *yes* to God: *Yes. Here I am. I come to do your will.*

We say *Yes* to God by being open to Him; by being receptive to His loving action in our lives.

Like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the one in whom the Word took flesh, the one who echoed the *yes* of the Christ whom she bore in her womb when she received the visit of the angel Gabriel at the annunciation, so we too are called to say: *I am the Lord's servant. Be it done to me according to your word.*

When we live in this attitude of heart then, just like Mary, the first disciple, we find that we live our discipleship in a fruitful, life-giving, way.

Mary conceived life, she gave flesh to God within her own flesh, precisely because she responded to the Archangel Gabriel saying: *Be it done to me according to your word.*

At the heart of this holy night we are invited to contemplate Mary wrapping her child in swaddling clothes and laying Him in a manger.

These swaddling clothes evoke already the grave-clothes in which Christ will be wrapped after His death on the cross.

We are invited to look to the manger (a place of feeding for the flock).

This setting evokes the gift Jesus made of His flesh when He gave Himself to us as food at the Last Supper on the eve of His passion.

We are invited to open the ear of our hearts to hear the angels' song *Peace on earth.*

This song prefigures the message of peace the Risen Christ addresses to all those He greets after His resurrection from the dead.

We live all this in the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist: the sacrament which makes us one with Christ and which through Him makes us one with the Father.

As we receive the Lord in Holy Communion, eating His flesh and drinking His blood, we become one with Christ and He becomes one with us.

The words of the psalm sung in the introit *Dominus dixit ad me* are as applicable to us as they were applied to Jesus in the gospels at his Baptism and at the Transfiguration: *Dominus dixit ad me.*

*Filius meus est tu. Ego hodie genui te.*

*The Lord says to me, you are my son ... you are my daughter. This day have I begotten you.*

Just as the water will be mingled with and lost in the wine when the two are mixed together before the gifts are brought to the altar for consecration, so we are all called to become one with Christ, hidden with/lost with Christ in God

Let us pray in our own hearts tonight an echo those words pronounced on behalf of all as the water is mixed with the wine: *Father, make me come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled Himself to share in my humanity.*

Just think of what the liturgical prayer of the Church has us say.

It clearly proclaims that God has become one with us so that we may become one with Him.

What amazing grace! What extraordinary graciousness! What profound humility on the part of God!

The Lord of heaven and earth became one, He becomes one, with the poor, weak, vulnerable human beings we are.

We may well fall upon our knees as we sing *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!*

Just think of how far God went in Christ-Jesus to prove His love for us!

The All Powerful, All Holy God, lowered Himself to become weak with the weak, one with sinful humanity.

In his famous treatise *Against the Heresies* St Irenaeus, reflecting on the significance of God taking on human flesh in Christ-Jesus, spells out for us not only what the consequences of the incarnation were for God, but also what they should be for us.

He tells us that our response to the humility of our God should be to *live in God's love, willingly, thankfully.*

What amazing love revealed by God so simply in Christ-Jesus!

It is in defenceless vulnerability that our All-Powerful God comes to us in the child of Bethlehem.

This should not surprise us, for it always in defenceless vulnerability that true love manifests itself. The humble birth of our Saviour shows us the extraordinary simplicity of the Father's love.

In tonight's gospel we see love reveal itself in great humility.

The birth scene that Luke depicts for us in tonight's gospel passage is one of loving intimacy.

It is a scene of loving intimacy into which we are introduced alongside the poor shepherds who come to pay their homage to the child born to a homeless young couple who welcome their child's birth in a very precarious situation, for it was in an out-house that they found shelter and welcomed Jesus' nativity.

The King of heaven and earth was not born in marble halls but among cattle stalls!

The great St Irenaeus goes on to teach us is that what Christ's incarnation in this context does for us is nothing less than to recreate us in love, restoring in us God's own image and likeness.

Let us listen to Irenaeus' words again. He tells us *Christ came to invite us to become like Himself ... He became a Son of humankind in order to accustom humans to live in God and accustom God to live in humanity.*

These words call to our attention the wonder of human being: the wonder of the Christ-child's human being, the wonder of our own human being, the wonder of each person's human being.

I suggest that we regard the invitation addressed to us tonight as an invitation to pray for the grace to dare to live our own lives as Jesus lived His: in love! Yes, in loving humanity!

May we live our lives as Jesus lived His: in simple, true, defenceless, vulnerable, non-imposing love!

We can do this with God's help.

It was in an attitude of simple, true, defenceless, vulnerable, non-imposing love, an attitude of humility and openness of heart, that Christ-Jesus lived the whole of His life, including those moments of His paschal mystery which are evoked for us in tonight's gospel with its references to the swaddling clothes, the manger and its echoing of the word peace: the moments of Christ's passion, death and resurrection which we celebrate in this and every Eucharist.

We heard St Irenaeus tell us that Christ came into the world to invite us to be like Himself.

Christ came into this world to show us how to live our humanity.

That is the lesson we should take away from our encounter with the Lord here on this Holy Night.

May we become more and more like Jesus.

Like Jesus, the Christ, may we live our lives as a *Yes* to God, an ever obedient response to the Father's will!

Amen!