

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD



The title above is the Church's way of saying Christmas. As you know, today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. That indicates we are almost at Christmas! We have lit all four of the candles on the wreath. We have progressed from darkness to light.

And that's one of the main things we celebrate at Christmas - the light of Christ. Jesus even told us that He is the Light of the World. He came to dispel the darkness.

All our preparations will soon be completed. In the world outside of church, it seems that we have been preparing for months. Here in church, however, only since November 28 - the First Sunday of Advent.

And while most of the world will forget Christmas on December 26, the Church will only just begin to celebrate. On the liturgical calendar, the Christmas season starts with the Vigil Mass of Christmas (which for us this year is at 3:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve). The season of Christmas extends through the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which this year falls on January 9, 2022.

At Christmas we celebrate the nativity of the Lord. This word nativity can be traced to the Latin meaning birth or to be born. We are celebrating Jesus' Incarnation - the birth of God as man.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: "Jesus was born in a humble stable, into a poor family. Simple shepherds were the first witnesses to this event. In this poverty, heavens glory was made manifest..." #525

The birth of Christ gives us a great paradox. Almost everything we might expect about God coming into the world as man is not what actually took place. He was not born in some fancy mansion or palace, but rather a "humble stable." He was not born into a wealthy family, but rather "into a poor family...in poverty." The great and powerful were not His first visitors, but rather "simple shepherds." Keep in mind, in those days shepherds were considered to be among the lowest of the low in society.

These facts should serve to compel us to regard those who are poor and humble and simple just as we love Jesus. Jesus was also a refugee - He had no place to live. He was also a migrant, because the Holy Family had to flee to Egypt to escape persecution.

Do you think these occurrences were all accidents? Of course not! By His very humble birth, Jesus shows us how we must honor migrants and refugees and the poor and the lowly, just as we reverence Him.

Jesus came out of ordinary circumstances. But, indeed His Incarnation is most extraordinary! These same ordinary conditions that Jesus was born into still exist today.

These very same situations are where we can find Jesus today. We find Him in the poor, in the migrant and refugee, in anyone who is maligned or disrespected for any reason. So even today, we find Jesus where we least expect to find Him!

Keeping all of this in mind is an important reason why we need to be always open to the grace of God at work in our lives. God's grace is freely given and unmerited. God's grace helps us to become closer to Him and to who He wants us to be. We can never have enough grace - only Mary was "full of grace."

In these final days leading up to the great feast of Christmas let's try and take some quiet time to reflect on how we can put the gift of God's grace to use in our daily lives. How can we become closer to Him, who is so extraordinary, through those who are seemingly so ordinary? By doing this we can indeed bring the kingdom of God into focus and we can help make heaven on earth!

I'd like to take this opportunity to express my very best wishes to you and those you hold dear as you celebrate the wonderful blessings of the Christmas Season.



Jim Madura