

## Christmas Vigil 2009

*Luke 2:1-14*

Christmas has arrived!

Mary and Joseph and Baby Jesus have arrived.

Well, actually they arrived long ago, but they just *keep arriving*.

Hence our beautiful re-enactment of the Nativity.

Our re-enactment, and our frequent re-reading of their arrival is meant to help us to focus on the reason for the season,  
on a mysterious present.

Christmas is about presents, right?!?

Actually, Christmas is really about *one* present, a present that God gives.

We gather here not just because it is vaguely the Christmas thing to do, and, if we do not, something would vaguely feel like it is missing.

We come to receive and, more importantly, to be *received by*

- God become human
- the Savior
- Christ the Lord

Now, if you children do not mind,

I am going to speak to the big people for a moment.

You children understand Christmas more easily.

Big people, however, can get complicated along the way,  
and lose sight of certain things.

You children understand, in the deep simplicity of your hearts, that God somehow became a child, so that

- we not be afraid of Him
- He be as close as possible to us

You children understand that it is in fact very simple.

Where is the new Bethlehem (which means “house of bread”),  
the new manger?

Our hearts!! And all we must do is open our hearts,  
and there is a special joy. So simple...

*Indeed: St. Leo the Great once preached on Christmas (early 400's):*

*Dearly beloved, today our Savior is born; let us rejoice.*

*Sadness should have no place on the birthday of Life.*

*The fear of death has been swallowed.*

*Life brings us joy with the promise of eternal happiness.*

If Jesus is the reason for the season, and if we gather to encounter him,  
then all of our seasonal efforts  
(braving the Mall, decorating, baking, traveling, and hopefully *praying*...)  
culminate in the utter simplicity of *this* celebration.

Yes, that's all folks!

Advent does not lead to the Christmas tree.

Advent leads to the house and altar of God, where Jesus comes again.

What happens around the Christmas tree  
is an extension of what we celebrate here.

This is, in fact, *paramount* for us to grasp.

Why?

Because there is much anticipation as we prepare,  
and we can be disappointed if we do not anticipate the right thing.  
Everything that we see around us incites us to have high expectations,  
expectations that everything end with a bang: like a Jonas Brothers concert.  
And, lo and behold, all of our seasonal efforts end in

- this simplicity
- closeness to One who is silent
  - *like* (most!) a newborn
  - *in* the Eucharist

If we anticipate and expect Jesus, we will never be disappointed.  
The One who is Life, the Silent One, Jesus the Christ is present,  
and He wants a relationship that fulfills, that fills full each of us.  
I cannot prove it,  
but perhaps the fact that we continue to celebrate Christmas,  
given all that incites us not to celebrate  
(including our fatigue and past disappointments), is a first sign.

We are here this evening because *Christmas is this Christ*.

Each of us here is mysteriously drawn

- whether we know it or not
- whether we go to church every day or once a year at Christmas.

If Christ is real, and he is Goodness Itself, and goodness radiates,  
then he respectfully and *unconditionally* draws each one of us to Himself.  
We come *drawn*, and we come with desires and expectations,  
and a whole host of issues.

The opportunity we have this evening is to welcome him in a new way,  
by giving ourselves to him, and to experience healing:

“Lord I wish to encounter you; here am I”.

Some of us have never really encountered Christ.

Today may be the day.

Today may be the day, like the shepherds, to come before Him in awe,  
to let ourselves be touched deep inside.

Let there be awe this night.

Heaven comes to our little earth, so that earth might be joined to heaven.

Heaven has come to each of our little lives, so that, deep inside,  
the life of heaven might begin.

Although outward appearance may suggest otherwise,  
deeply, everything has changed.

*God* indwells our lives,

a God of love embraces our whole person, including our frail flesh.

*The Word became flesh*

We are invited to rest in the Prince of Peace.

Let awe arise in us, and let us touch Him with our hearts in faith.

And let the love, as it pours forth, melt away any despair or hurt or division.

*Sadness should have no place on the birthday of Life.*