

## Christmas Vigil 2007

*Luke 2:1-20*

“So this is Christmas....”

Mary and Joseph and Baby Jesus have arrived.

Well, actually they arrived long ago, but we re-enact (and beautifully!) the Nativity so to help us to focus on a mysterious gift.

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

- the Second Person of the Trinity, “The Word”, become flesh
- God become human
- Jesus the Christ

Christ is indeed the reason for the season.

Now, I am going to speak to the big people for a moment,  
if that is fine with you children.

You see, 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.*

Now: “big people”, for whom it can be less simple.

All of our seasonal efforts

(braving Mall madness, decorating, singing, baking, traveling, and hopefully *praying...*)  
culminate in the utter simplicity of *this* celebration.

Yes, this is it folks!

Now, some may be thinking,

“No no no: the opening of the gifts at home is it. This is just the church thing that we do, well, because we just do. There is something religious in all this after all.”

No: *actually*, all Christmas roads lead here, to the Christ who comes to us in a special way during this celebration; and from here we go forth, to continue the celebration.

The opening of gifts, etc. should be an extension of what we celebrate here.

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

Because, for those of who are ambitious and want to take a big bite out of life,  
there can be a bittersweet lining to Christmas.

Christmas can be challenging for some of us.

Why?

Precisely because our focus and our expectations are sometimes misplaced.

We want to live what we see heartily, and Christmas is first about what we do *not* see.

Moreover, our society (insofar as it celebrates Christmas)

incites us to have high expectations,

expectations of peace and joy, familial harmony and reconciliation,  
a sort of vacation bliss...

As you have noticed, everything is geared to end with a bang

-- like Celine Dion's show in Vegas or a KISS concert.

And, lo and behold, all of our seasonal efforts end in

- this simplicity
- closeness to One who is silent
  - *like* a newborn (well, like many newborns!)
  - *in* the Eucharist

Do not get me wrong: peace and joy, familial harmony, etc. are fantastic.

But, at Christmas, they are the *consequence* of a Presence, the presence of God.

The One who is Life, the Silent One, Jesus the Christ is present.

I cannot prove it, but perhaps the fact that we continue to celebrate Christmas,  
given all that incites us not to celebrate (including our own fatigue and doubts),  
is a first sign.

We are here this evening b/c *Christmas is this Christ*.

And each one of us here is mysteriously and, for the most part, *unconsciously* drawn  
-- 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 give ourselves to him.

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 has come 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.

Heaven, i.e. *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 him touch us.

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.*