

Solemnity of Christmas – C
December 25, 2009 – Holy Angels Church
Homilist: Rev. Roland M. LaPlante

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST: Tonight (today), we are celebrating a birthday. Everybody likes a birthday and is usually willing to join in the festivities. But this birthday is unique. It's celebrated not only by a few relatives and close friends, but by millions of people. It's celebrated not only in the person's home, but throughout the entire world...from Bethlehem in Judea to South Meriden in Connecticut...and all the way from earth to heaven...because this is the birthday of God become man.

It was a great light that burst upon the world some 2,000 years ago in the little town of Bethlehem...when angels' voices pierced the cold darkness of that night and proclaimed to poor shepherds watching their sheep: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." God is born to us!...and in the early dawn of that day, they ran to see what had happened. And afterwards, glorifying God, they told others what they had heard and seen. And from that day till this very

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day...all over the world...the simple story of the birth of Jesus has been told and re-told.

When we greet the joy of this day, we feel a revitalizing of faith, a new sense of hope, and a rekindled dedication to love....because as winter reaches the point when the sun is most distant from the earth, and the temperature is at its coldest, Jesus appears like the Morning Star to melt human hearts and renew the beauty of being human.

When you go deep beneath the tinsel trees and colorful lights of this festive day, beneath the carols and pageants, beneath the millions of Christmas cards and endless yards of wrapping paper, there's something we all feel deep within our hearts, and it's this: God gave himself to us as a little child. He who made the sun to warm the universe, now has

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need of farm animals to warm him with their breath. He who is all-powerful is now in need of others. God came to us as a child, perhaps because no one can love anything unless he can get his arms around it; or perhaps so that even the littlest among us could embrace him with love. And because God comes to us as a little child, it means that we should receive him as children ourselves...with simplicity and humility. There's no guile in him; there should be none in us.

Anyone traveling to Bethlehem to visit the place of Jesus' birth will find there the Church of the Nativity, built by Emperor Constantine in the 4th century at the behest of his mother Saint Helen. The front doorway is so low that one needs to enter it on his knees...it's only about 3 feet high. Once inside we need to bend our heads as we descend an ancient staircase. Then, we have to get down on our knees to see Christ's birthplace, underneath a low altar. It's there, on our knees, that we can

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see a silver star in the ancient cave, and around it a Latin inscription: “Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.” It’s a defining moment in any Christian’s life.

When Jesus came to this earth, he was born in a cave where men sheltered beasts. There’s something beautiful in the symbolism that the church where the cave is has a door so low that it must be entered on one’s knees. I don’t believe it was originally that way; I think it was changed because during some conflict soldiers entered the church on horseback and desecrated the church. But it certainly is symbolic of the humble attitude we should have that the door is so low now.

There’s no room for pride as one stoops and enters the church, to discover the meaning of this day. Those persons, however, who do bend

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their egos, who do surrender their pride, can enter the cave, as did the shepherds, and find that they're not in a cave at all, but in a new universe where all of life has been touched with the grandeur, the power, the goodness of God.

There are other symbols of the meaning of Christmas that are part of the beauty of this celebration. There are four sets of Gospel narratives of the event of Christ birth for today: the gospel for the vigil of Christmas, the gospel for the Mass of Christmas night, the gospel for the Mass at Dawn and the gospel for the Mass during the day. All four, taken together, are a theological summary of the meaning of Jesus' whole life and redemptive work, so it's certainly legitimate to see in them hints of what would come to pass. For example, as a child, the savior was placed in a manger, a feed-box; at the Last Supper, he became our spiritual food. As a child he was wrapped in bands of cloth and laid in the cave-

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manger; after the crucifixion, he was wrapped in a shroud and laid in a cave-tomb. His birth was heralded by a star, a light shining in the darkness; and St. John later wrote about his death, “the light came into the world, but people loved darkness rather than the light.” His birth was announced first to shepherds, the lowliest of society; later, he would become the Good Shepherd...spurned and held in no esteem.

All these hints remind us that Christmas draws its true meaning from Easter...he was born in order that he might die for us. That’s the true meaning of Christmas...a bitter sweet celebration to be sure, AND a celebration of love.

So the lesson Christ teaches us today is a lesson of love...his love for us, our love for God, and our willingness to imitate him by loving others. Love of neighbor always asks that we give up something of ourselves...our time, our own interests, our money, our energy. For

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weeks, we've been running around from store to store in a near state of exhaustion just to experience the joy of giving to others. In giving our time, our energy, our money to buy a little gift for someone else, we experience happiness. We feel a newness of faith in God and in each other. The lights that decorate our trees and homes are just a dim reflection compared to the great light that would come into this world everyday, if we would live as God wants us to live.

There are no enemies among us tonight (today)...nor should there ever be. The spirit of Christ fills us and mellows us and makes us tolerant of all. So let's pray that everyday will be as now...and Christ's Second Coming will be that much sooner. So...Come, Lord Jesus! Make us one in love, as you are one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Make us one with you and with each other.

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I extend to all of you Christmas greetings and a prayer that your lives, from this moment on, will be closer to the Savior. May you live in his love, his light, his protection. Merry Christmas to all!