

Christmas - A
Isaiah 9:1-6;
Titus 2:11-14 ;
Luke 2:1-14
Little Flower - 12/25/16

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all of you a most blessed and joyful Christmas. In a special way, we want to welcome all of our visitors, especially those who are returning home to Little Flower to celebrate this Christmas Liturgy with us tonight.

Tonight's Gospel tells the beautiful story of the birth of Jesus Christ in three parts. First, Luke gives us the context of Jesus' birth. In other words, he locates the birth of Jesus in space and time, even providing a little of Jesus' genealogy. He wanted his readers then and for all time to know that Jesus was a real human being who lived in real time.

Second, he describes the birth of Jesus: *"While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son."* There was nothing dramatic about Jesus' birth. Everything about his birth was ordinary. We are even told that he was wrapped in swaddling clothes, which would be like us saying that he was diapered. The only thing out of the ordinary was that he was born in a stable and laid in a manger. The story of his birth is a powerful reminder that Jesus is like us in all things but sin.

The third part of the Gospel helps explain Pope Francis' emphasis on going out to the people on the margins. The first announcement of Jesus' birth was to poor shepherds who were keeping night watch over their flocks.

In tonight's first reading, we hear the words of Isaiah: *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;...For a child is born to us, a son is given us;.... They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace."* Yet there is anything but light and peace in the world. This past Monday 12 people were killed and 48 were injured when a truck plowed into a Christmas market in Berlin. We are all aware of the suffering and destruction in the Middle East, especially in Aleppo and especially the suffering of the children. There is an opioid crisis in our country. There have been more murders in Indianapolis this year than ever before.

However, because of Jesus' birth, there are some things we know for sure. We know for sure that God loves us. He not only loves us; he loves us superabundantly. As Jesus would proclaim: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..."* [Jn. 3:16]. The proof of God's love was the gift of his only Son.

A second thing we know for sure is that the birth of Jesus marked the beginnings of God's kingdom on earth. The miracles Jesus worked during his life were not simply random acts of kindness. They were the signs of the coming of God's kingdom that were prophesied in the Old Testament, a kingdom of healing, peace, and reconciliation.

Finally, we know for sure that Jesus is Emmanuel or God-with-us. Today Jesus continues to live within and among us in his Word, in the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and in his Spirit. We make Jesus present to others by our love for and service to others, especially the needy and marginalized, and by our becoming instruments of healing, peace, and reconciliation in our families and communities.

My brothers and sisters, even with all the chaos in the world, Jesus still stands and knocks at the door of our hearts. Will we open the door and let him enter? Will we welcome Jesus, the greatest gift of God's love, the gift that makes all human love possible?

Oh, what a gift,
What a wonderful gift;
Who can tell the wonders of the Lord?
Let us open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts;
It is Christ the Lord; it is he!¹

¹Pat Uhl & Michael Gilligan, "Canticle of the Gift," *The Johannine Hymnal*, (Oak Park, Illinois: American Catholic Press, 1970).