

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

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 today.

Throughout the Old Testament, God through the prophets promised and prophesied the coming of the Messiah or Savior. No prophecy was clearer than the prophecy in today's reading from Isaiah: *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light... For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful...both now and forever."*

Today's reading from Titus begins with the words *"The grace of God has appeared..."* We could replace the word *grace* with *gift*: "The gift of God has appeared." The grace or gift of God is Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate today. Jesus was, is, and will always be God's greatest gift to us.

He is God's greatest gift to us because he is God himself in human form. Today's Gospel tells the story of the nativity or birth of Jesus. John's Gospel captures the significance of his birth: *"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us..."* [1:14]. God could not have become closer to us than by becoming one with us and then living among as one of us.

Jesus, then, is the sign and embodiment of God's superabundant love for us. . *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..."* [John 3:16]. Moreover, according to St. Paul, *"...God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us"* [Rom. 5:8]. By dying for us, Jesus freed us from sin and, therefore, made it possible for us to love God, others, ourselves, and the world. This was his greatest gift to us: he created the possibility of love in our lives, especially the most authentic love, i.e., self-revealing, self-giving, self-sacrificing love like his own. Today we live in a world where, unfortunately, we are bombarded by bad news. What we rarely see or hear, except perhaps at Christmas, is all the good news, the news about people doing their best to do the right thing, to live a good life, and to make the world a little better for others.

My brothers and sisters, theologian Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx wrote a beautiful book entitled *Christ: The Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. Jesus is the sacrament of God, the sign and embodiment of God's love for us. However, we, the Church, are called to be the sacrament of Jesus, the sign and embodiment of Jesus' love for us. Just as Jesus is a gift to us, we are called to be a gift to others. This Christmas, as we give and receive beautifully wrapped gifts, let us focus on the gift that is the basis for our gift giving, the gift of the infant Jesus, the embodiment of God and his love, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, worshiped and adored by angels and shepherds. After all, without Christ, there would be no Christmas.

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!<sup>1</sup>

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