

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.

In today's Gospel, we heard the Christmas story with all its familiar elements: Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, Jesus' birth in a manger because there was no room in the inn, and the appearance of the angels to the shepherds. We all know the story well. The story recounts the facts surrounding Jesus' birth. However, more important than the fact of his birth is the meaning of his birth.

The reading from Isaiah suggests one meaning of Jesus' birth: "*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...*" In John's Gospel, Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" [8:12]. However, Jesus would also tell us that we are the light of the world [Mt. 5:14]. In other words, Christ may be the one true light of the world, but he can only shine as brightly as we are willing to be Christian lights in the world.

In his Letter to Titus, Paul wrote, "*The grace of God has appeared, saving all.*" Grace is God's love given as gift. If Jesus is the grace of God, Christmas means the love of God has appeared among us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's love living among us. The significance of this is found in the prologue of John's Gospel: "*Of his fulness we have all had a share—love following upon love*" [1:16; NAB 1970]. In other words, Jesus himself is the embodiment of love in our world. As Christians, we are called to embody the love of Christ in our love for others, especially those on the margins, the peripheries.

This past week I read an interesting article on America Media titled "In the Incarnation, the impossible became possible." In the article, the author asks us to imagine for a moment that we were one of the shepherds:

And then suppose that I spent the next few years going around first-century Palestine telling people that I had seen the newborn Messiah in something like a stable in Bethlehem. And that his mother was a frightened but fearless teenage girl and that his father was an aging carpenter who talked to God in dreams. His earthly father, that is. For his real father, I'd tell them, was God—you know, the one who created the world and holds it in being even now? That God.

It sounds impossible! The Gospels are full of examples of the impossible not only becoming possible but becoming real: love overcomes selfishness; good overcomes evil; life overcomes death.

Finally, in the reflection for Saturday of the second week of Advent, the author of *The Little Blue Book* contrasted John the Baptist and Jesus. He wrote, "...although both John and Jesus preached repentance, a change of heart, reform, Jesus was more than a reformer. He was a transformer. He changed the condition of the world by his entry into history." By becoming human, living among us as a human being and then dying and rising for us, Jesus triumphed over sin, suffering, sickness, and death itself. His birth, life, death, and resurrection proclaim that love triumphs over all.

My brothers and sisters, Pope Francis' consistent message to all people is one of invitation and welcome. If for any reason you are no longer active in a Church, we invite and welcome you to join us at Little Flower.

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).