

Christmas - A
Isaiah 9:1-6;
Titus 2:11-14 ;
Luke 2:1-14
Little Flower - 12/25/22

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. Likewise, we wish to welcome all those who are watching us live streamed and those who will watch us recorded later.

I once heard a talk that suggested three words capture our celebration of Christmas: history, mystery, and majesty.

Today we celebrate the birth of an infant 2000 years ago. Today's reading from Isaiah prophesied his birth: *"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."* At the Annunciation, the angel told Mary, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God"* [Lk. 1:35]. Matthew's Gospel quotes Isaiah: *"Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"* [1:22-23]. Finally, in the Prologue of John's Gospel, we read, *"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory..."* [1:14].

As believers, we believe that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, the Word made flesh, Emmanuel, God-with-us, Christ, Messiah, Lord, and Savior. However, even non-believers cannot dispute his impact on history. Many of us are familiar with "One Solitary Life." After recounting all Jesus did not do, it concludes, "Nineteen centuries have come and gone and today he is the central figure of the human race."

Even as we celebrate his historical coming, we await his future and final coming in majesty. During his life on earth, he was largely unrecognized both as a child and as an adult. From the Gospels, we know people did not believe in him. For example, people said, *"Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him* [Mk. 6:3]. When Philip told Nathaniel that Jesus was from Nazareth, Nathaniel responded, *"Can anything good come from Nazareth?"* [Jn. 1:46]. When Jesus comes in glory, he will be recognized by all.

Today we celebrate his historical coming, but we also celebrate his coming into our lives and hearts today in mystery. As Fr. Jean Galot said, when Jesus returns in majesty, the great revelation will be that he has been with us all along. He is with us in the Eucharist. At every Eucharist, a tiny piece of bread and a little wine become the body and blood of Jesus. If we really believe that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, we should have no problem believing that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist. Jesus becomes incarnate in human love: the love of couples, the love of parents and children, the love of friends. Finally, Jesus is present when our lives are transformed by suffering and/or by service to others that brings Christ's love to others.

My brothers and sisters, today we celebrate the Incarnation of Jesus. We celebrate God becoming human in Jesus. We celebrate bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ. We celebrate Jesus becoming flesh in others' love for us. We celebrate our becoming the body and blood of Christ as we love others, especially those who most need our love.

We thank all of you for joining us today. If for any reason you are no longer active in a church or do not have a church home, 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!¹

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