

2019 December 25

Nativity of the Lord (Vigil Mass)

Readings:

First: Isaiah 62.1-5, "The nations shall see your vindication." (2a)

Psalm: 89, "You are my Father, my God, the Rock of my salvation." (26)

Second: Act. 13.16-17, 22-25, "God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus as he promised." (23)

Gospel: Matthew 1.1-25, "She will bear a Son, and you are to name him Jesus." (21a)

Prophecies fulfilled

Jesus the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world, made his appearance in that dark and cold night as the fulfilment of a long, long expectation of generations. Peoples of all nations probably were praying for a salvation or deliverance, which might have meant different things for different people. The prayers for deliverance from all parts of the world still bombard the walls of heaven! Most in those days did not know what kind of deliverance they were expecting and praying for. The Israelites might have had in their mind a political liberation when praying for the Messiah.

In today's Messianic prophesy Isaiah foresaw the vindication and salvation, a crown of beauty, and spiritual 'rejuvenation for the Israelites. St. Paul brings to the notice of the people of Antioch prophecies about the Redeemer to come from the progeny of Israel. The Bible teaches us that God chose Abraham, the great Patriarch from whom God raised a people and groomed it for the Redeemer to take birth. Every aspect of his birth, life, death and Resurrection was prophesied through the centuries to this people. However, they could not accept him when he was born on earth.

He came as was prophesied, but not in a manner acceptable or even intelligible for the people. *He was prophesied to be a king, prophet, and priest, a Wonderful Councilor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, and Everlasting Father.* (Isaiah 9.6) However, he came to the earth with no signs apparently pertinent to any of the above prophecies. He was born as a hapless child in a cattle shed, as the son of a poor carpenter and an unknown village maiden, with the manifestation of absolutely no glory and power. He had to live as a fugitive, with no place to rest his head and no earthly thing as his possession.

His message too was not easily understood by his contemporaries. They could not grasp the meaning of his sayings like, 'blessed are the poor', 'love your enemies', 'show the other when someone slaps on your right cheek', 'I came in search of sinners', etc. However, these messages through the centuries after him to this day, and throughout the world, have been inviting the people of sensitivity and sensibility, and there are many who find in them means of deliverance for our times. The manger is still meaningful and inviting! **May you have a Grace-filled and joyous Christmas!**

2019 December 25

Christmas

Nativity of the Lord (Mass during the night)

Readings:

First: Isaiah 9.2-4, 67, "A child has been born to us, ... His authority shall grow continually." (6a & 7a)

Psalm: 96, "Declare his glory among the nations." (3a)

Second: Titus 2.11-14, "He is who gave himself for us." (14a)

Gospel: Luke 2.1-16+, "She gave birth to her firstborn son." (20c)

Christmas, Biggest of all Jokes!

In the 2016 December 11th edition of the Catholic Register (p.19) Peter Stockland quotes a celebrated Norwegian novelist Karl Ove Knausgaard, who reports of Pope Francis watching soccer on the television with some Cardinals. For him when the pope does this in the visibility of the press, internet and the people all over the world, "*there is no longer a Pope. He is no longer the representative of the divine on earth, everything has gotten mixed up and holiness has dissolved into foolishness*".

This author seems serious and furious, not joking. If he were to be living at the first Christmas time in Bethlehem, when Jesus was born in a cattle shed, to an unmarried maiden, and when that was proclaimed by the angels as the birth of the Son of the Most High God, and had he come to know that this Son was hanged on the Cross, Knausgaard must have lost all faith in the Almighty God. He might have forsaken his strong religious belief, and declared that there was no more a God out there!

Most people of those times including their religious leaders, who knew even the time and place of the birth of the Messiah, rejected this revelation from the Angels. What happened at Bethlehem was the unwrapping of the Mystery of Divinity that was hidden till that time. God became man, borrowing human flesh from the Virgin, to live on earth visible and tangible, as Emmanuel, God with us, among men and women, thus closing the gap between humanity and divinity. However, humanity, even after this event, tries its level best to keep God, divinity, wrapped in mystery and away from itself.

As the Church has been doing it for twenty centuries, Pope Francis is more actively unwrapping the mystery, inviting us to be humane and let Jesus be so. For Knausgaard Pope Francis cannot be 'the representative of the divinity on earth', because television is only for humans and the Pope is not human when in public! The 'civilized world' today is throwing God out of its life, Christ out of Christmas! What about us? Do we really believe that the Babe in the manger is God made man, is Emmanuel, or God is still up there? *Peace be with you!* That is the gift of the Emmanuel.

2019 December 25

Nativity of the Lord (Mass during the day)

Readings:

First: Isaiah 52.7-10, *“Break forth into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem.”* (9b)

Psalm: 98, *“All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.”* (4a)

Second: Hebrew 1.1-6, *“He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”* (3c)

Gospel: John 1.1-8, *“He was in the world, and the world came into being through him.”* (10a)

Partners in Redemption!

The tone of the day's celebration is set by the first verse of the psalm, *“O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.”* Isaiah is really in the mood of singing praises to the messenger of peace. The letter to the Hebrews reports, *“He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being.”* (Hebrews 1.3) The beginning of John's gospel elucidates the theology of creation and incarnation of God among humans. All the lessons in unison explain the same mystery of God's taking flesh and dwelling among men, becoming Emmanuel, God with us.

As a fairy tale it is so wonderful and endearing and people are cheered by it. However, when it is to be presented as reality truly happened, and continues to happen in our own times and places, there are no many takers for it. When it is proposed that it should happen in our own hearts here and now, it becomes difficult to swallow even for those who want to believe in the mystery of incarnation, in the true story of Christmas. Is it not our story today?

Jesus, the Son of God, truly took flesh from humanity through the Virgin Mary and was borne on earth as a human child visible and tangible to the people in Bethlehem and later in all Judea and surroundings. That was the story of Christmas, later becoming part of the story of Jesus of Nazareth. It was not a story just to be concluded with the crucifixion in Calvary; it was and is a story to be lived and continued in our time, in and through us, by those who believe in Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the Galilean.

These believers must see him from the manger in Bethlehem, through Calvary, and beyond with an eye different from that of king Herod of Judea, his courtiers, the priests and leaders of Israelites at the time. With this vision we the believers will understand today's scripture and every word therein as true. This vision will enable and strengthen us to partner with the Incarnate Word in his mission to be the Redeemer of the world. Christmas is an invitation to each of us to be co-redeemers of the world with Christ. *“I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the peoples: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”* ***“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”*** (Luke 2.10-11, 14) ***Alleluia!***