

**December 25, 2019 Announcing A Royal Birth Homily:** For many centuries the English have observed a time-honored tradition of announcing royal births. In 1948, for instance, the then princess and future Queen of England, Elizabeth, was pregnant with child and soon to deliver her first born son, Charles, heir to the English throne. English subjects were aware of her pregnancy and eagerly awaited the birth of the child. When the blessed day finally arrived and the baby born, the news was met with great fanfare, including the spectacle of a forty-two gun salute at the Tower of London.

In a tradition dating back to medieval times, the so-called Town Crier in his largely ceremonial role announced the birth to the British public.

Another more formal announcement takes place immediately after birth. The custom is as follows: the birth announcement is officially typed on royal letterhead by the doctor who delivered the baby and then sent in a car to Buckingham Palace to be displayed on an easel in front of the palace of the people.

It is rather striking that the Christmas story begins with an announcement, a stunning announcement of a royal birth. The one who delivers the message is an angel (The Greek word for "Messenger"). Angels figure prominently in the New Testament account of our Lord's coming. Indeed, Jesus' entire life was punctuated by the presence of angels from his birth to his resurrection. Some of the most popular Christmas carols feature angels in the title. Two that come to mind are "*Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*" and "*Angels We Have Heard on High*".

On the most holy of nights the angel brought tidings of great joy. He announced a royal birth. "To you is born this day in the city of David a savior who is Christ the Lord". (Lk. 2:11) Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises made long ago. "He shall be great, and shall be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord will give him the throne of his father, David." (Lk. 1:32) Jesus is the newborn King, the long awaited-Messiah. The angelic presence at the moment of Christ's birth hints at the divinity of the child that is born. That is precisely why we are urged to rejoice at Christmas. God has visited his people. The Almighty has come to us in the feebleness of a child, helpless and powerless.

It is worthy of note that only a select few received the message and they were an unsavory class of people, shepherds. No one really knew the significance of the event in Bethlehem at the time it happened. The late Christopher Dawson, a historian and Roman Catholic, once remarked that on the morning after the nativity the leading papers of Rome, Athens and Jerusalem did not announce it. It was simply not important. From the beginning, the nativity of Our Lord was known by only a few. God did not come into the world in power and drama. He was born in obscurity.

If we wish to appreciate the meaning of Christmas, we should turn our attention to a venerable Benedictine tradition observed on the morning of Christmas Eve by Benedictine monks. The Abbot sings the solemn announcement of our Lord's birth. For the witnesses it is an unforgettable moment. The Abbot intones the words, "He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and after nine months (the monks kneel), He is born at Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary." (The monks now prostrate themselves... they lay face down, their foreheads touching the floor.) It is an act of adoration and humility. By lowering themselves, they imitate the mystery which they will celebrate later in the evening. ("He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance." (Phil. 2:7) The Eternal Word, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity and Son of the Heavenly Father, has come into our history. He is truly Emmanuel, which means "God is with us". We can touch him with our hands. We can see him with our own eyes.

One of the staples of this holiday season is the animated television classic, "*A Charlie Brown Christmas*". In the story it was left to a shy little boy named Linus to answer the searching question of his friend, the doleful Charlie Brown, about the meaning of Christmas. During the performance of a Christmas play, Linus confidently walks to center stage and, standing under a spotlight, quotes from St. Luke's gospel account of the nativity in which angels from Heaven tell a group of badly frightened shepherds of the birth of Christ. When finished, he says, "That is what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown".

The Lord is no longer in eternity, outside of time and space. The Lord now actually appears. Christmas is an inspiring reminder that God has kept and will keep his promises to us who are his people.

To be a Christian is to be a herald of the Good News of Christ's birth. With each passing generation it is up to us to tell the world the inspired words from the gospel of John: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us". (Jn. 1:14)

On Christmas day Mary gave birth to the King of Kings.

Amen!