

CHRISTMAS; NIGHT/DAY; 2022

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Despite the heavy commercialization of Christmas, this evening and tomorrow morning all the churches in the world will be packed with millions of Christians who come together with great joy and jubilation to celebrate the birth of Jesus. But we may wonder what the attraction of this day is. Are we gathered here just to celebrate the birthday of a religious leader who disappeared from the world over 2000 years ago? Normally nobody celebrates the birthday of somebody who is dead but only the living. If we celebrate the birthday of Jesus, we believe that he is still living with us today and will continue to live in the world till the end.

In Luke's gospel the angel declared to the shepherds, **"Behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.** So, today over two billion Christians are happy, for a **savior** is born for them and in the words of Isaiah the Prophet **He is Emmanuel, means God is with us.** No other religious leaders could ever claim that they would be with their followers till the end of the world; but only Jesus Christ. Please listen to the last words of Jesus to his apostles in Matthew's gospel, **"And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."** (Mt. 28: 20). So it is very clear that if you have taken some time off to be here in the church we are celebrating the birthday of Jesus who is still living and he is our Savior.

St. Paul beautifully explains the mystery of Incarnation in Philippians 2:6-7. He says, **"Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness."** He became an ordinary human being so that he could identify himself with the most ordinary man. We may wonder why God took all these troubles to send His only Son into the world and made him one like his creatures. In order to get the answer to this question we need to just go to St. John's gospel chapter 3: 16-17, where we read; **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For, God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."** The whole purpose of Incarnation can be summarized in these verses. St. John is the Evangelist who speaks so much about the **"Love of God"** both in his gospel and letters. So it is clear that out of love for mankind God sent His Son into the world to **save the whole world.** John emphatically says that God did not send His Son to condemn the world rather to save it. No doubt, God had to send His only Son into the world because human sins have reached the climax. So in a way God had the right to

punish the wicked and vindicate for their sins. But He wanted to save the wicked also through the Son.

According to the Old Testament belief the Messiah would be coming with vengeance and he would appear in the Temple suddenly and will begin his purification work starting from the priests. In the Book of Malachi chapter 3: 2 the Prophet says, **“But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For, he is like the refiner’s fire or like the fuller’s lye.”** So his coming is not a pleasing experience for the sinners. St. John the Baptist too holds the same picture of the Messiah. His testimony about the Messiah is given in his opening statement in Matthew’s gospel chapter 3: 10 & 12, **“Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”** In these verses what we hear is about the Messiah of vengeance. But finally, when Jesus came as the friend of the tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners, even John wondered what happened to the ax and the winnowing fan? What happened with the chaff? Instead of burning it, he collected it with the wheat! When Jesus said, **“I did not come to call the righteous but sinners,” (Mt. 9: 13b)** the scribes and Pharisees wondered what sort of Rabbi Jesus was. Their major accusation against Jesus was that he moved with sinners and ate with them. He called a traitor and public sinner Matthew to be his disciple; he released the prostitute woman from being stoned to death; through the parable of the lost sheep and prodigal son he showed to the people that **God is a forgiving Father and he can forgive and forget all our sins, if we repent.**

In my homilies repeatedly I say that **only in Christianity we find a God so forgiving and loving, who can love every one of us as we are.** Today we are gathered here not just celebrate the birthday of Jesus rather we are celebrating his love and forgiveness he has shown us and shows us. Remember, God has shared with us the greatest gift that is His only Son Jesus Christ. **Jesus gave us the greatest gift that is his love and forgiveness and eternal life.** So Christmas is the feast of sharing. If God has given us the greatest gift, from our part then we too need to give back God our best gift. The greatest gift we can offer God is our faith and at least one hour a week. Very often people steal that one hour also from God with the excuse that they have so much to do. Unfortunately without the help of God, nothing goes well with us. Please remember if we have the best gift for Jesus, definitely, he will have the same for us. When we take one step towards him, he will take two steps towards us. Jesus says, **“But, seek first the kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given you besides.”(Mt. 6:33).** In John’s gospel Jesus says, **“Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.” (Jn. 15:5).**

