

## Christmas Day Mass – C

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The noble phrases which open the Fourth Gospel, as read at today’s liturgy, underline the solemnity of this celebration, but they also give rise to a question. Why on earth would the Word of God dwelling in the serenity of eternity want to enter this world, marked by so much malice and suffering and death? Why come from the sphere of heavenly bliss to this war zone of earth, to be like us in all things except sin, to bear with us the weight of so many of the miseries that commonly afflict our human condition?

The answer is given us in the Creed. Why did he come? **For us and for our salvation.** Love is the meaning of it all. The act of incarnation is more eloquent than any words that Jesus spoke. He came in love to be with us, not only in physical proximity, but fully sharing our human nature with all its limitations and pains and sorrows. “Truly he has borne our infirmities.” The Word incarnate comes as Immanuel, God-with-us. And since the days of his flesh, he continues to be with us in a way closer than that of any other human being—closer to us even than we are to ourselves. Henceforth we can never be totally bereft of support and consolation because, however dire our external circumstances, “the Word became flesh and pitched his tent in our midst.”

Over the centuries the images of Christmas have multiplied. From the bare narrative of the Gospels we have created not only cribs with angels, shepherds, and the mysterious Magi, but also Christmas trees, family festivities and Santa Claus—and Christmas carols and Christmas cards and Christmas shopping along with Christmas dinner. All of these are fine, but their multiplication can create such an upheaval that we forget the single reality that is at the heart of all this activity: the incarnation of the Word, and God’s unconditional love which brought it about.

This *Day Mass* of Christmas is intended to help us to stop for a moment to reflect on the spiritual heart of Christmas. “The Word became flesh and pitched his tent in our midst.” Why? “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,” *for us and for our salvation.*

Despite the mess humankind has made, and continues to make, of the world God created, God's love has never wavered. He has never considered us beyond salvage. We were and we are precious in his sight, and so there is nothing God will not do to bring us to a more abundant life.

"The Word was made flesh and pitched his tent in our midst" but there is more to the mystery. "Of his fullness we have all received," grace in us matching grace in him, so that all Christ was by nature we able to become through grace. The Word became human to lay down before us the road by which we may become divine.

How great is God's love for this very imperfect human race! God makes provision for us to become sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity. What a transformation is being enacted in us, today and always! We are being drawn up into that sphere from which the Word descended, into the very heart of God.

Jesus spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd. He is the one who not only seeks the lost sheep but, with infinite love, carries it home on his shoulders. He descended that we might ascend. He assumed our human nature so that we might become sharers in his divine nature. God so love the world that its loss was inconceivable. God sent his Son to redeem and restore what was weak and fallen and willfully astray.

In love God created us. In love the Word came to pitch his tent in our midst. In love God will bring to perfection the good things already begun in us, transforming us from glory to glory in the glorious image of the Son. The first and final word of Christmas and its deepest meaning is "love:" the unconditional love God has for each and every one of us, made present and radiant in the person of Jesus Christ whose birth we celebrate this day.

- Fr. David M. Chiantella