

## **Christmas-Midnight-C**

Our Christmas Mass celebrates a simple yet astounding event – so simply expressed yet so radical in its reach. Tonight we celebrate God coming to his people. Tonight he comes to us, in the birth of Jesus, God-with-us.

We gather as a people who fret and puzzle over the reality of God, at times resisting the invitation to believe and at times protesting against it. Yet here we see the coming of God into our midst, into our history, simply to be with us, a babe, without threat or coercion, just wanting to say 'Here I am. Come to me.'

We find a description of ourselves in the First Reading, from the Prophet Isaiah: a people who know what it is to walk in darkness, who feel the burdens of life like a yoke or a bar across our shoulders, a people who are familiar with anger and even bloodshed.

Isaiah promised that a light would come and a leader who would establish peace, beginning in our own hearts.

Indeed God has always sought out his people, with leaders, kings and prophets. But now, in the fullness of time, he comes in our flesh, as a child.

In this way the words that God wants to speak to us are so clear. God speaks to us of tenderness and hope, to quote the words of Pope Francis. When God meets us he tells us two things.

The first is to 'have hope'. This is so important as of ourselves we can easily lose heart. But God always opens doors for us, he never closes them. He opens the doors of compassion, mercy and forgiveness that we can lift up our heads again and go forward in hope of his unswerving love.

The second word that God speaks to us is 'tenderness'. He says: 'Do not be afraid of tenderness'. In the helplessness of the babe we see God so close to us, in such precarious circumstances, asking us not only to trust ourselves to him but also to express ourselves to him with all the gentleness and tenderness that is in our hearts. This is the Lord of love who invites us into a relationship of love. And in all our loving, we show our own vulnerability and joy in the tenderness we have for each other. So too it is with the Lord, as this night makes so clear.

Tonight's Gospel reading places the birth of our Savior firmly in a particular time and place. This is not a myth or a legend. It is an historical fact. It happened. The witness of Luke is trustworthy. In faith we pinpoint the moment and the manner in which God has unequivocally entered our history—the history of mankind and therefore the history of each one of us.

But he comes not as a mighty emperor to impose his peace and order. He comes as a child to invite us to discover afresh the deepest purpose of our lives and to receive from him the healing that we need.

And as we look around the world on this pivotal moment we know how much healing we need. We know how much we need to repair and strengthen the bond of our universal brotherhood, our common humanity so that everywhere and always we see each other a brother and a sister, children of a common Father who loves each one as much as every other and asks us to do likewise.

This is the light which shines from the Christ-child and tonight we always think of Bethlehem, the blessed town of his birth. So too today we give a special thought and prayer to our fellow Christians around the world who suffer for their faith. Christians are the most widely persecuted religious group in the world today and this evening we think especially of the Middle East, especially of Egypt, Iraq and Syria. Christianity was literally born in the Middle East and we must not forget our Middle Eastern brothers and sisters.

We come to this church this evening freely and relatively easily, ready to give a simple act of witness to our faith. But for many going to church is an act of life-risking bravery. We thank them and seek to be inspired by their courageous faith.

In the light of the Christ-child, in the light of so many brave fellow disciples, tonight we seek to open our hearts again to welcome Christ into our lives, not simply as a consolation in our hardships but as the Master, the Lord, who alone can teach us the way to live each day. As Paul said to the young Titus: 'God's grace has been revealed... and taught us that what we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God...to be self-restrained and live good and religious lives...while we are waiting in hope...having no ambition except to do good' (Titus 2.11-14).

This is the day on which God comes to meet us. Let us not go missing. Let him enter, let him lead, then we shall indeed be full of the joy of the knowledge and love of the Lord. Then we shall be ready to speak to others of the joy and consolation of our faith, inviting them to share with us in this pathway of life. This is the way of Christmas joy and it is my pleasure to wish you all, you and your families, a very holy and happy Christmas.

*Amen*

- Fr. David M. Chiantella