

Christmas Day 2019

Reason For the Season

John 1:1-14

St. Andrew's Church, Jacksonville, OR

By Fr. Bill Baker

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Merry Christmas my friends! I am glad you are here today to commemorate and celebrate the very birth of God into our midst. What greater gift could there be but that our God would become one of us, embracing our pain, experiencing our trials and subjecting himself to our sufferings and in the end laying down such a precious life that we might one day be reunited with him.

The whole purpose of the Incarnation is found in the complete expression of God manifested in His love for us...while we, who would betray this love, deserve nothing more than to pay the price for the sins that separate us from communion with the Almighty. But God's love for us is so far beyond human understanding; it is unmerited and does not even make sense from our perspective. But, no matter how inconceivable God's love is toward us, he became one of us, joining our humanity with his own divinity as a way to save us and bring us back into a right relationship with the Father.

But our salvation comes at a price. The Incarnation of Jesus into our midst, the birth of our savior within the confines of our humanity, the dawn of God into the human race... would end on a cross, but not as a finality, but as a new beginning...a salvific bridge by which we may cross from death to life. The Incarnation is not separate from the cross but part of the progression focusing on the greater plan of our redemption. One without the other would be futile and an utter miscarriage of God's eternal plans. If we are to be saved from eternal condemnation an innocent substitute would have to die in our place, one that could overcome our sinful natures and resurrect body and soul once again

into the presence of the Father. Who alone but God himself could endure such a tribute of love for the benefit of mankind?

The Omniscient foresight of God planned for His son to be sacrificed for our sins even before that sin became a reality in Eden. In hindsight we are able to see this truth unfold as seen in Genesis chapter 3, *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed: It shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel”* (vs. 15). Even before sin and death entered the equation God overcame the price of our transgression by offering himself in our place. And so the birth of Jesus and His subsequent trials and tribulations on our behalf were part of God’s plan for our redemption from the very beginning.

Every year, Christmas enters the hearts of many and the minds of all. It is impossible not be reminded of God’s manifestation into flesh and blood whether or not one accepts or denies the workings of the Holy Spirit in the virgin birth of Jesus. In our secular age where ‘Merry Christmas’ has devolved into ‘happy holidays’ it becomes too easy to take the blessings of this life for granted and disregard the saving grace of an infant born in mysterious obscurity. Don’t miss the love that lies within you, the love that calls you into eternal bliss.

As Mary and Joseph sought a room for the night they found more doors closed than were opened to them. And even today, as Jesus seeks to enter into our hearts many doors are still closed. Some are so close, standing at the door with their hand on the nob, but refusing to turn the latch. Feeling unworthy, they come close enough to listen at the door, but cannot get past the indignation of lives lived in sin. So let me reassure you...it is for the very purpose of overcoming your sins that Jesus took on human flesh and he will remain at the door resiliently knocking that you may have every opportunity to let him come in and be the center of your life. Jesus says *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me”* (Revelation 3:20).

Why does God what a place within you where sin has such a hold? It is not for himself that he wants to enter such a place, but it is for your eternal soul by the virtue of his love that he persists in the hearts of all humanity. At the annunciation Mary sets the example we are to follow

in responding to the will of God, *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word”* (Luke 1:38). Responding to the truth can be a frightening experience. It goes against our natural inclinations, but...once we have committed ourselves to the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ, our lives will never be the same and our hearts will be opened to a love and joy that will uphold us in any trial the world presents.

Jesus tells his disciples, *“ Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”* (John 14:1-3). Here we see the selfless nature of God as he comforts his own. Jesus is aware he is going to be arrested, that he is going to be tortured, that he is going to be crucified and that he will die. He also knows that those who have professed their love for him will abandon him. God knew all this from the very beginning...and yet...he came anyway.

Truth and love; grace and mercy, joy and hope all wrapped in a baby's apparel; an innocent infant begotten by the Father...*“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...”*

And it is here, at the altar of God, where that infant child and risen Lord come together, reaching across the Table with the promise of resurrection for all who open the door and come to the banquet. Christ has prepared a place for you in heaven and while we remain in our present form he has prepared a place for you at this Table. You have heard the knock...it is time to open the door and step across the threshold and enter into the love of Jesus Christ...a babe who now sits at the right hand of the Father.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.