

SOLEMNITY OF CHRISTMAS
Is 9:1-6; Ps 96; Ti 2:11-14; Lk 2:1-14
December 25, 2021
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Every year at Christmas, we celebrate the great truth that God became man, that He was born among us and into our world. The mystery of Christmas is the miracle of the Incarnation – that God became man. And when this happened, it was the fulfillment of ancient prophecies which promised the coming of a Messiah.

The Chosen People to whom these prophecies were made had waited for centuries for a Redeemer. But even they did not expect, and never imagined, that God Himself would come to save them. They never imagined that God Himself would be born among them. They thought that God would send a great and powerful figure who would rescue them and restore them to glory. They knew the prophecies, such as the one we heard from the prophet Isaiah in the first reading: *“For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.”* But even the Chosen People never expected that God would become man and be born on earth. This is the miracle and mystery that we celebrate at Christmas.

And this is why we love looking at the Nativity scene, especially at Christmas. Pope Francis says the Nativity scene is “an enchanting image” that “never ceases to arouse amazement and wonder” among Christian people (*Admirabile Signum*, 1). It’s captivating to think of a poor child being born out in the cold in a manger, but when we consider that the Child is divine, that He’s God who entered His creation, the Nativity scene becomes even more enchanting. It challenges the mind and the heart and the soul to grasp and appreciate such a sublime truth. Here’s how St. Anselm summarized it in the 11th century: “The whole universe was created by God, and God was born of Mary. God created all things, and Mary gave birth to God” (Office of Readings for December 8).

So, when we look upon the Nativity scene, our minds and our hearts are moved by the thought that it was God who was born here on earth. And when God entered our world, He brought with Him from Heaven what our world desperately needed – both then and now. He brought with Him from Heaven the gift of His mercy, the forgiveness of our sins, and the offer of eternal life. He brought with Him the truth about our lives and how we were meant to live, and He brought with Him the divine assistance of grace that helps us live as He taught and accept His

offer of eternal life. We discover the reality of this divine assistance when we live a sacramental life with honesty and integrity.

But that was not all that Christ brought with Him when He was born on earth. He also brought with Him from Heaven even more spiritual gifts that the world desperately needed – both then and now. For example, He brought with Him a great display of simplicity and humility. Although He was God, He was not born in a palace among luxury and comfort, but rather in a cold, dirty manger, surrounded by animals. Mary and Joseph were poor – they had almost nothing in the world. But they had this Baby, and they adored Him as if He were the greatest treasure in the world. That’s another reason we love looking at the Nativity scene. We love seeing Mary and Joseph watching over the Christ Child with wonder and awe, and guarding Him as the greatest treasure in the world.

So, when God was born among us, He brought with Him from Heaven the spiritual gifts that the world needed the most and still needs now. He brought mercy and grace and truth and humility and the offer of eternal life. This is what we celebrate at Christmas. We celebrate the spiritual gifts that Christ brought to earth which have changed the world and continue to change our lives, even 2,000 years later.

And how are we supposed to respond or react, when we think of God coming to earth and being born at Christmas? St. Paul tells us in the second, reading from his Letter to Titus. He says, “*The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ.*” If we believe that God was born into our world, then we should respond by rejecting godless ways and worldly desires. We should respond by asking for the spiritual gifts that Christ brought with Him from Heaven – for mercy, grace and eternal life. And we should respond by accepting and following Christ’s teachings as the truth about our lives and the way to find eternal life.

The miracle and the mystery of Christmas should have an effect in our lives, not just once a year at Christmas, but throughout the year, and throughout our lives. If we *really* believe that God Himself came into our world, and brought with Him gifts from Heaven to heal our souls, then our lives should never be the same. If God came to us, then we should respond by *going to God*, in our actions, in our words, and in our thoughts. This is how we can honor the Christ Child who was born to save us and to bring us everlasting life.