

# *REFLECTIONS*

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## **CHRISTMAS: A PROFOUND EVENT**

Christmas is rapidly approaching. It is a time when we experience the joy and peace of God's presence. The crèches in our homes, the decorations and tableaux in the churches, the sermons and joyous music help us recall the most memorable day in human history – when God became man.

We are very familiar with the story of Our Lord's birth, especially as related in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke: the census, Mary and Joseph's trip to Bethlehem, the rejection at the inn, finding room in the stable, the angelic hosts, the guiding star, the shepherds and wise men, and most of all the babe lying in the manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. Yet, the images, as beautiful as they are, are almost too familiar so that we do not fully appreciate the meanings they present.

Christmas marks a turning point in human existence, a new era for the human race. Some 2,000 years ago, the Second Person of God came to Earth and assumed the nature of man. His birth changed our relationship with our Creator. God was no longer an abstract, unseen, eternal, infinite, omniscient spirit that our reason could not comprehend. God as a Divinity is a mystery. But when Jesus took the form of man, He gave us a proximity to God. He was a person, who was born, had friends, taught, suffered and died – occurrences which we can comprehend. He became a personal God.

His birth in many ways is full of anomalies. Although it had been foretold by both Jewish and pagan prophets, and the Jewish people had been awaiting his arrival, St. John tells us that "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." He was God the Son, coequal with the Father and ruler over the earth; yet, he chose to be born in a stable. He was begotten, not made, conceived not through a physical act of love between a mother and father, but as a spiritual act of will. God through the Archangel Gabriel asked Mary to be his Son's earthly mother; she consented with the words, "Be it done to me according to thy word," and she conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit. He was born in time, yet He is eternal, existing outside of time. We consider death as the end of our purpose in life. Death was the purpose of Jesus's life. He came to die ignominiously on the Cross for our sins, to pay the debt that mankind had incurred from Adam onward. Without that first Christmas, there would be no Easter and the gates of heaven would still be closed to us.

On that first Christmas, Jesus became truly and completely human, while remaining truly and completely God. With all of the human shortcomings He assumed, there was never any lessening of His divine nature. His actions and teachings were always those of the Son of God. This is the essence of the Incarnation, the union of two natures, the divine and the human, in a single person who exerted both.

We now are in the liturgical season of Advent, the prelude to Christmas. This is a period of preparation, penitence and expectant waiting for the coming of the Lord. It is a good opportunity to reflect on who we are, why we are here, and why God chose to become one of us. We are children of God, made in His image and likeness, imbued with a soul that will exist forever, and

gifted with reason to temper our inclinations and free will to guide our actions. As Scriptures make clear, we are in this temporal life to work out our salvation so that we may merit an eternity in the kingdom of God. Jesus, through His coming gave us the means – grace, the Eucharist, His Church – to attain that salvation.

In spite of the moral darkness of the world in which we live, Advent gives us hope. St. Paul reminded the Ephesians that before their encounter with Christ, they were without hope. In spite of their gods, they were without God, in a dark world, facing a dismal future. Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Spe Salve (Saved in Hope)*, points out that with the coming of Christ, Christians “have a future: it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness... The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.”

In the days ahead, let us prepare ourselves for a religious Christmas. Let’s display a crèche in our homes and yards, send religious greeting cards, promote seasonal songs that praise God, and strengthen ourselves spiritually -- say the Rosary, spend time in Eucharistic Adoration, go to Confession, meditate on the liturgical readings -- so that when we go to Mass on Christmas Day, we can be truly joyous about the arrival of our Lord.

Our recollection of this momentous birth and its implications should not be limited to December 25. As we say the Rosary and meditate on the mysteries, we recount the life of Our Lord – from Mary’s Fiat through His Ascension and return to the Father. Every time we pray the Hail Mary, we repeat the words of the Archangel Gabriel who greeted Mary with the salutation, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee,” and invited her to become the mother of God. The prayer continues with “Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb,” the words that Elizabeth used to welcome her cousin, Mary. As we pray, we should reflect on when these words were first said and of the birth that followed. We should be thankful for the great gift Jesus gave us, which began with the first Christmas, the redemption of man.

If we live everyday as a preparation for Christ’s coming, the results will be profound. For our own sake, and the sake of the people we love, have hope and pray. If we do, the world *will* be a different place.

May you and your family have a very *Blessed and Merry Christmas!*