



The Holy See

MIDNIGHT MASS

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Christmas, 24 December 1998

1. *“Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy... For to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:10-11).* On this Holy Night, the Liturgy invites us to celebrate with joy the great event of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. As we have just heard in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is born into a family poor by material standards, but rich in joy. He is born in a stable, for there is no place for him in the inn (cf. *Lk 2:7*); he is placed in a manger, for there is no cradle for him; he comes into the world completely helpless, without anyone’s knowledge, and yet he is welcomed and recognized first by the shepherds, who hear from the angel the news of his birth. The event conceals a mystery. It is revealed by the choirs of heavenly messengers who sing of Jesus’ birth and proclaim glory “to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased” (*Lk 2:14*). Through the ages their praise becomes a prayer which rises from the hearts of the throngs who on Christmas Night continue to welcome the Son of God.

2. *Mysterium*: event and mystery. A man is born, who is the Eternal Son of the Almighty Father, the Creator of heaven and earth: in this extraordinary event the mystery of God is revealed. In the Word who becomes man the miracle of the Incarnate God is made manifest. The mystery sheds light on the event of the birth: a baby is adored by the shepherds in the lowly stable, at Bethlehem. He is “the Savior of the world”, “Christ the Lord” (cf. *Lk 2:11*). Their eyes see a newborn child, wrapped in swaddling cloths and placed in a manger, and in that “sign”, thanks to the inner light of faith, they recognize the Messiah proclaimed by the Prophets.

3. This is Emmanuel, God-with-us, who comes to fill the earth with grace. He comes into the world in order to transform creation. He becomes a man among men, so that in him and through him every human being can be profoundly renewed. By his birth he draws us all into the sphere of the divine, granting to those who in faith open themselves to receiving his gift the possibility of sharing in his

own divine life. This is the meaning of the salvation which the shepherds hear proclaimed that night in Bethlehem: "To you is born a Saviour" (*Lk 2:11*). The coming of Christ among us is the centre of history, which thereafter takes on a new dimension. In a way, it is God himself who writes history by entering into it. The event of the Incarnation thus broadens to embrace the whole of human history, from creation until the Second Coming. This is why in the Liturgy all creation sings, voicing its own joy: the floods clap their hands, all the trees of the wood sing for joy, and the many coastlands are glad (cf. *Ps 98:8, 96:12; 97:1*). Every creature on the face of the earth receives the proclamation. In the astonished silence of the universe, the words which the Liturgy puts on the lips of the Church take on a cosmic resonance: *Christus natus est nobis. Venite, adoremus!*⁴. Christ is born for us; come, let us adore him! My thoughts already turn to Christmas next year when, God willing, I shall inaugurate the Great Jubilee with the opening of the Holy Door. It will be a truly great Holy Year, for in a completely unique way it will celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of the event and mystery of the Incarnation, in which humanity reached the apex of its calling. God became man in order to give man a share in his own divinity. This is the good news of salvation; this is the message of Christmas! The Church proclaims it tonight, by means of my words too, for the peoples and nations of the whole earth to hear: *Christus natus est nobis* - Christ is born for us. *Venite, adoremus!* Come, let us adore him! © Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana