



The Holy See

MIDNIGHT MASS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Christmas, 24 December 2003

1. *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given" (Is 9:5).*

The words of the Prophet Isaiah, proclaimed in the First Reading, contain *the truth of Christmas*, which together we re-live this night.

A Child is born. In appearance, just another of the world's many children. A Child is born in a stable in Bethlehem. He is born in a condition of extreme deprivation: poor among the poor.

But the One who is born is *"the Son" par excellence: Filius datus est nobis.* This Child is the Son of God, of one being with the Father. Foretold by the Prophets, he was made man by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a Virgin, Mary.

When, shortly, we shall sing in the Creed *"... et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine et homo factus est,"* we shall all kneel. We shall meditate in silence on the mystery which is accomplished: *"Et homo factus est!"* The Son of God comes among us, and we receive him on our knees.

2. *"The Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14).* On this extraordinary night the Eternal Word, the "Prince of Peace" (*Is 9:5*), is born in the lowly and cold cave of Bethlehem.

"Be not afraid," says the angel to the shepherds, *"for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:10-11).* Like the unnamed and fortunate shepherds, let us too run to meet *the One who has changed the course of history.*

In the austere poverty of the crib we contemplate *"a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:12).* In the vulnerable and weak newborn babe who cries in the arms of Mary, *"the grace of God has appeared for the*

salvation of all men" (Tit 2:11). Let us pause in silence and worship!

3. O Child, who willed to have for your crib a manger; O Creator of the universe, who stripped yourself of divine glory; O Redeemer, who offered your vulnerable body in sacrifice for the salvation of humanity!

May the radiance of your birth *light up the night of the world*. May the power of your message of love thwart the proud snares of the evil one. May the gift of your life make us understand ever more clearly the worth of the life of each human being.

Too much blood is still being shed on the earth! Too much violence and too many conflicts trouble the peaceful coexistence of nations!

You come to bring us peace. You are our peace! You alone can make of us "*a people purified*" and belonging to you for ever, a people "*zealous for good deeds*" (Tit 2:14).

4. *For to us a Child is born, to us a son is given!* What an unfathomable mystery is hidden in the humility of this Child! We would like to touch him; we would like to embrace him.

You, Mary, who keep watch over your all-powerful Son, *grant us your eyes* to contemplate him with faith; *grant us your heart* to worship him with love.

In his simplicity, the Child of Bethlehem teaches us to rediscover the real meaning of our existence; he teaches us "*to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world*" (Tit 2:12).

5. O Holy Night, so long awaited, which has united God and man for ever! You rekindle our hope. You fill us with ecstatic wonder. You assure us of the triumph of love over hatred, of life over death.

For this reason we remain absorbed in prayer.

In the luminous silence of your Nativity, you, Emmanuel, continue to speak to us. And we are ready to listen to you.
Amen!

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