

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

Throughout the season of Advent, the Church has meditated upon God's promises, so often spoken by the prophets, to send a saviour to the people of Israel who would be Emmanuel, that is, God with us. In the fullness of time those promises were fulfilled.

Today, the twenty-fifth day of December, unknown ages from the time when God created the heavens and the earth and then formed man and woman in His own image. Several thousand years after the flood, when God made the rainbow shine forth as a sign of the covenant. Twenty-one centuries from the time of Abraham and Sarah; thirteen centuries after Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt. Eleven hundred years from the time of Ruth and the Judges; one thousand years from the anointing of David as king; in the sixty-fifth week according to the prophecy of Daniel. In the one hundred and ninety-fourth Olympiad; the seven hundred and fifty-second year from the foundation of the city of Rome. The forty-second year of the reign of Octavian Augustus; the whole world being at peace, Jesus Christ, eternal God and Son of the eternal Father, desiring to sanctify the world by His most merciful coming, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, and nine months having passed since His conception, was born in Bethlehem of Judea of the Virgin Mary. Today (tonight) is the (vigil of the) nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh.

This is the formal proclamation of the birth of Christ from the Roman Martyrology. It is an ancient text that draws from the history of man the Incarnation of God.

Today we celebrate that day when a young woman in an obscure part of the world in an unknown village in the feeding trough of a barn in the middle of the night bore a baby boy. That boy would live an obscure life for thirty years until a day when he became an itinerant traveller amidst the desert towns and

villages of an outpost of the Roman Empire. His religious talk offended the faithful and pious people and on the pretence that he was challenging the government was arrested and sentenced to death. The people that he had gathered around him left him in fear.

So why, over two thousand years later, do we date all years and centuries and millennia to that day, why do people around the world decorate their homes and streets, sing songs and exchange gifts? Because at that birth heaven and earth met. The almighty and invisible God, creator of the universe, whose name was never to be said, was born a baby and His name was Jesus. The stars came together to signal His birth, the angles of heaven filled the sky and announced to peasant shepherds that the King of the world, the saviour of all men and women, was born.

For millennia the Jewish people had awaited the coming of the Messiah, the one to sent them free from the perpetual enslavement they suffered from conquering empires and who would reclaim the throne of David and establish forever the Kingdom of Judah. It was believed that the Messiah would be a mighty warrior and noble king. But here, in this manger in a stable lay a helpless child. But the folly of God is greater than the wisdom of man for here in this baby was God incarnate who needed to be loved just as much as much as He himself would love. Here in this new-born child was the creator of all worlds so vulnerable that it felt the cold of the night air, the hunger of its empty stomach, and longed for the touch of His mother and father—and the world would never be the same.

It is that vulnerability, which we behold in every new-born child, that marks the work of God throughout history. The creator of the universe took the form of the created, the all-powerful and all-knowing subjected Himself to the weak and the stupid, the giver of all life gave Himself over to death. and He who is love was made a slave to hate. That vulnerability is known today in Holy Communion, for on our tongues we receive God.

We who carry the name and bear the sign of that child, our Lord, must share in His vulnerability by opening our hearts to the grace of the Holy Spirit so that we may become witnesses to the Gospel whose proclamation began with the annunciation of His birth.

We whose faith carries us day by day must be signs of faith, hope and love celebrating that in the new-born child God has kept the promise He made from time immemorial—that we would not be left alone in our sin and we would not suffer death forever but that He Himself would come to build His home amongst us so that we may share in the divinity of He who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.