

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jan 1st 2016

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

Pope Francis' World Day of Peace Message, 2016

There's a regular cafeteria of options to celebrate on this feast. But with the distractions, frustrations, mad rush and frenzied partying of Christmas itself, it's hard on December 25 to focus on the real meaning of the feast. So, at least for my own reflection, I'm going to concentrate in today's liturgy on the Octave day of Christmas. We don't much do octaves any more, but Bishop N T Wright encourages us to treat them in a more celebratory fashion. "Serve champagne after mass," he says, "every day throughout the octave". I suspect he didn't mean that totally literally, but doing so emphasizes dramatically that Christmas is a feast really to be celebrated.

Otherwise, what does the birth of a baby boy 2100 years ago mean for us?

If you were from central Africa or Outer Mongolia and had never encountered Christianity, you might be more impressed with the Christmas story than are we 21st century Christians. You might be shocked at its claim that the God who created the universe so loved His creation that He took on our mortal flesh, himself becoming matter, human – "born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters", as St Paul reminds us in today's second reading.

But once again, St Paul points out: "God sent His Son . . . to ransom us." That birth in Bethlehem was not just an isolated event. It had a purpose – a God-given purpose. It is on Christ's birth that my status before God totally depends (that is, as God's adopted child). God thought we were worth it! The ancient Hebrews were constantly asking themselves in their sacred writings "What nation has a God like ours?" The answer, of course, was "None". At Christmas time we Christians ask ourselves the same question. And for the same good reason. Look at what He's done!

The Incarnation is certainly hard for us to get our heads around. It's hard to believe; yet it's something that's undeniably worth celebrating.

Champagne, anyone?

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