

Christmas 2024

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On this day we celebrate - and give thanks for - the birth of a child . . . who is God . . . and our Savior.

From all eternity God planned to send His Only-Begotten Son to take flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mother, Mary, in order that this God-man – the *New Adam* - would save us from our sins, and redeem for us that share in divine life that was lost to us by the *first Adam* through his sin.

Truly, as the Prophet Isaiah says (our 1st reading), we were a “people who walked in darkness” and who needed the Light of Christ.

And from all eternity the Blessed Virgin Mary was part of God’s plan of redemption and salvation; Mary was united with Jesus “*in one and the same eternal decree*” – another part of this marvelous mystery.

As St. Paul says, “When the *fullness of time* had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, [to deliver us] so that we might receive our status as adopted sons [in the Son]” (Gal. 4:4).

Who – but God – could ever have *imagined* such a plan to save us from our sins?

Pope Saint Leo the great explains in beautiful words the reason for the Incarnation and Birth of Jesus by the Blessed Virgin Mary:

“Unless the Son of God had stooped to be one in substance with His Mother, [taking on our lowly human nature], the whole human race would still be held captive [to sin] under the dominion of Satan. . . . But through the same Holy Spirit by whom Christ was conceived and brought forth, we too are able to be born again in the spiritual birth of baptism.”

Hear the words of Saint Augustine: “Awake, mankind! For your sake God has become man. . . . You would have suffered death *for eternity* had he not been born *in time*. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, that he not taken upon himself the likeness of sinful flesh. You would have never returned

to life, had he not shared your death. You would have perished, had he not come.”

Yes, sinful man, who through disobedience to God lost immortality, would find mercy through God by the sending of His Son, so that we might become adopted as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father, in order that one day we might be with Him – and enjoy eternal happiness in Heaven.

By becoming man, the Son of God took to Himself our lowly human nature, so that *the Creator of time might be born in time, and He through whom all things were made might be brought forth in our midst.*

And today, exactly 9 months after His conception in Mary’s womb on Annunciation Day, we marvel - in wonder – at His Birth!

Yet, the King of kings and Lord of lords is not born in magnificent splendor and comfort, adorned in gold and jewels; no, He is born in humble estate, in the cold, in a stable among the animals.

Mary, His Mother, who conceived Him as a virgin, *remains* a virgin in giving birth to Him - her virginity miraculously remains intact; and she, who is the New Ark of the Covenant, the living tabernacle of the Most High God, will forever remain a virgin.

The newborn Babe, Jesus, is laid in hay in a manger, a feeding trough for animals: the wood of that manger a symbol of the wood of the Cross which He will one day carry to Calvary to undergo a horrible crucifixion; and the hay, food, a symbol of bread – for this little Child is truly the Living Bread that came down from Heaven who will one day feed us with His own Body and Blood, in order to help us live and love in imitation of Himself, who loved us to the end.

It is no mistake that Jesus is born in Bethlehem, which literally means “house of bread.”

And today, we rejoice because, as Isaiah says, “a child is born to us, a son is given us, upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder

Counselor, God Hero, Father Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful.”

Yes, Jesus came to bring peace on earth. Peace is the tranquility of order; the fruit of right order in our own lives, and in society as a whole – between people and between nations.

In humility we acknowledge that our lives are not always ordered correctly; we are sinners and in need of God’s grace, which comes through Jesus Christ.

True, authentic peace can only come from Jesus. He IS our peace, and our reconciliation with God and neighbor.

I’ll end by quoting one of my favorite writers and speakers - the first and most famous televangelist, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, who will likely be beatified - one step away from being a canonized Saint - very soon.

Archbishop Sheen left us these words of wisdom:

“The Christmas message is not that peace will come automatically, just because Christ is born in Bethlehem; that birth in Bethlehem was the prelude to His birth in our hearts by grace and faith and love.

Peace belongs only to those who will have it. If there is no peace in the world today, it is not because Christ did not come; it is because we did not let him in.”

This Christmas let us open our hearts to Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Savior, and our King, that He may truly reign over us, so that we may order our lives rightly, and thereby enjoy the peace that only He can give.