

CHRISTMAS DAY 2017

1st Reading: Isaiah 62:11-12 (You shall be called "Frequented", a city that is not forsaken) –[from the Mass at Dawn]

Psalm 98: All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

2nd Reading: Titus 3:4-7 (The Savior appeared not because of any good deeds we had done, but because of God's mercy)
[from the Mass at Dawn]

Gospel: John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16 [from the Mass during the Day]

The Beginning of the Holy Gospel according to John

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning.

All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.

He came to his own, but his own people did not accept him.

But to those who did accept him he gave the power to become children of God.

These are the ones who believe in his name - who were born not by natural generation,
nor by human desire nor by human choice, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we saw his glory,
the glory of an only Son coming from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Of his fullness we have all had a share -
grace following upon grace.

For while the law was given through Moses,
this enduring love came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God.

It is the only Son, who is at the Father's side,
who has revealed God to us.

The Gospel of the Lord

*♪♪ O little town of Bethlehem how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by:
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light:
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight. ♪♪*

The beginning of the Gospel of John is the first one assigned to the Christmas Liturgy. It is really a beautiful poem, a hymn to Christ the light. That's why I wanted to begin with the carol we just sang. The same light that shines in the dark streets of Bethlehem, still shines in the darkness of our 21st century.

The last words of the Gospel today are — *"no one has ever seen God, the only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him."* They remind me of a story:

A young girl in a faith formation class started drawing during one of her lessons.

The catechist asked her, "what are you doing?" "I'm drawing a picture of God."

"But no one has ever seen God, we just heard that in our Bible reading. Nobody knows what God looks like."

The girl answered, "They will when I'm finished!"

Why are we gathered here this morning?

We are here to celebrate "Christmas", an old English word that means "Christ's Mass."

We are here to remember the love that became a human baby,

—the light that the darkness has not & cannot overcome.

We are here not only to remember the one who shows us what God looks like in human form, we are here to **be** God's work of art, God's song of love,

We are here to show the world what Jesus looks like.

When we sang the Gloria with the choir, we sang: ♪♪ *"Glory to God, — glory to God, —glory to God in the highest, —and on earth, —peace on earth, —peace to people of good will."* ♪♪

That is a translation of an old version of the Bible in Latin that I have always had some trouble with. It seems to imply that we have to **earn** God's peace by our good deeds or that the peace of Christ is only for people of good will.

Yet, the words in Luke's Gospel that were read last night are

*"Glory to God in the highest, and **peace to those on whom God's favor rests.**"*

And who are they? —The whole human race! —That is the good news the angels sang !



The birth of Jesus is a **gift**, not something we deserve **or** could ever earn.

The grace of God comes to all of us. In the 2nd reading we heard words that tell us,
“*When the kindness & generous love of God our savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any good deeds we had done, but because of his mercy, so that we might be saved by his grace.*”

The birth of Jesus is pure gift, —but it’s also a gift that needs to be received,
that’s where the part about “**Peace to people of good will**” makes some sense.

The words we sang could be understood to mean,

“**Peace to people who are ready to receive the gift of peace.**”

So, in a way, the Gospel translation & the Gloria are two sides of the same message.

Still, I’ll tell you a secret, because I am drawn to emphasize the truth —that it’s a gift,
when I came to those words in that song, —I sang *slightly* different words:

♪♪ “**and on earth —peace on earth, —peace to people of the world”** ♪♪

We sing about the gift of Jesus & the call to receive it in another verse of O Little Town of Bethlehem

♪♪ **How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is giv’n!
So God imparts to human hearts The blessings of his heav’n.
No ear may hear his coming, But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still The dear Christ enters in.** ♪♪

The Peace & love of God that we celebrate on Christmas is a totally free gift, but,
like the gifts under the Christmas tree, it’s a gift that needs to be unwrapped.

We tell the story of Christmas as much by our lives as by our words. We are called not just
to receive the Word of life, but to live it & to share it with others by the way we live & love.

Pope Francis writes about Christmas in words that reflect the Gospel for this morning.

“Jesus was born rejected by some and regarded by many others with indifference.

Today, too, that same indifference can exist whenever

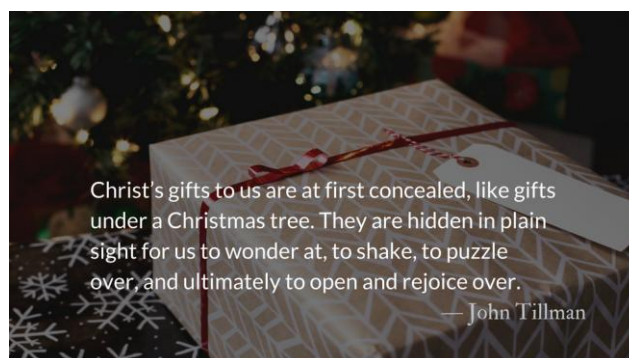
Christmas becomes a holiday with ourselves at the center rather than Jesus.”

We are called not just to celebrate Christmas, but to **BE** Christmas for others,
to **be** Christ’s presence in our world, to let others know what God looks like in human form.
To remind each other that we are one human family, with God as our Father.

The gifts of love, peace & hope have been given by God through Jesus, but
they may not accomplish the transformation of our lives & our world unless we unwrap them.

That’s why I brought this gift in front of the altar with me this morning

It contains an image of what Jesus promises all of us if we accept his birth & all its consequences.



[A little girl in the church came forward & opened the box in front of the altar.

Inside she discovered the caterpillar puppet which she proceeded to turn inside-out to a butterfly puppet.]



This is an image of the transformation promised by Jesus.



The promise of Jesus is that when we receive his gift of peace we will be transformed from a caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly and the people in our families & our neighborhoods will know what Jesus looks like.

♪ O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in; Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide in us, Our Lord Emmanuel! ♪

Will you unwrap this gift and let your life change?