

## Christmas 2009

**First Reading:** Isaiah 62:1-5 (Vigil Mass)

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6 (Mass During the Day)

Response: *All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.*

**Second Reading:** Titus 3:4-7 (Mass at Dawn)

**Gospel:** Luke 2:1-14 (Mass at Midnight)

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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 and cannot overcome.

There is a church that has a parking lot with an entrance and an exit, both one way. The sign at the entrance reads, "Enter to Worship," The one at the other driveway reads, "Exit to serve." I think that is a good description of why we gather here today.

You know there are four sets of readings for the Masses that are celebrated at Christmas. One set each for the Vigil, for Midnight, for Dawn and another for During the Day.

Together they celebrate the *Story* at the heart of our faith, the *Gospel* - the *Good News*. I would like to ask your help in reflecting on the meaning of the birth of Christ into our world, a world that needs good news as much as the one He entered so long ago. A world that needs a new story to help us imagine that love **is** possible, and peace **can** be real.

I will need your ears to listen to some of the words of the readings, and your voices to sing the *Good News* we celebrate on this feast.

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*At the Vigil Mass we hear:*

"No more shall people call you 'forsaken' but you shall be called 'My delight.'  
as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you."

"The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, God with us.  
You shall name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."  
He is still being born in us, so we still sing

♪ O come, O come, Emmanuel, ~ And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here ~ Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! O Israel, to thee shall come Emmanuel! ♪

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*In the readings from the Mass at Midnight we hear:*

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. They name him prince of peace. Sing to the Lord a new song."

Beloved, the grace of God has appeared, saving all of us.

Do not be afraid, I proclaim to you good news of great joy, a savior has been born for you. You will find an infant lying in a manger.

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.

In churches and in the Mall we hear

♪ *Hark the Herald Angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king."  
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.  
Joyful all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies, with angelic hosts proclaim,  
Christ is born in Bethlehem. Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn king!* ♪

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*At the Mass at Dawn we read:*

They shall be called God's holy people.

When the kindness and generous love of God appeared, we were saved, not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of God's mercy.

Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

We hear carolers and choirs sing:

♪ *What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?  
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;  
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary.* ♪

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*At the Mass during the Day - the first set of readings assigned to Christmas - we hear:*

God has spoken to us through the Son, through whom he created the universe.

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

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

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

And, from Isaiah, words that have been set to music in another song:

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the one who brings glad tidings."

Would you repeat the words of this song after me?

♪ *How beautiful—How beautiful ~ On the mountaintop—on the mountaintop  
Are the feet of those—are the feet of those ~ Who bring your word—who bring your word.  
How beautiful—how beautiful ~ On the city streets—on the city streets  
Are the lips of those—are the lips of those ~ Who speak your peace—who speak your peace.*

.....HOW BEAUTIFUL ! ♪

The **Gift of Christmas** is the love that forgives our sins and the light that cannot be overcome by any darkness.

The **Call of Christmas** is to empty my hands of whatever gets in the way of receiving God's gift. To do this I have to find that place in myself where I need the love and mercy of Christ. I need to find the ways that I am powerless and choose once more to turn my life and will over to the care of God. Anyone who has lost a loved one this past year can feel this powerlessness. The "*possessions*" I most need to let go of are my illusion of control, my resentments, my fears, my guilt and my greed.

The **Work of Christmas** is to tell another story to each other and to the world. The story of how peace is possible, of how love came into our midst in a child, of how life can be born from death.

We tell the story as much by our lives as by our words, we tell a new story by opening our hearts to the ones who have more obvious needs. We are called not just to receive the Word of life, but to live it and to share it with others by the way we live and love.

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.

Will the people in our families and our neighborhoods know what Jesus looks like when they see us today and tomorrow?

The **gift**, the **call** and the **work** of Christmas is to learn to live the message of so many of the carols we sing at this season: Sing and Pray with me the last verse of the wonderful carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem".

♪ 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! ♪