

Christmas, Dawn, (2018).

Let us go to Bethlehem.

The words the shepherds said to one another: “Let us go to Bethlehem”, could well be the reason why you have come to church here this Christmas morning. There is something about Christmas that makes us want to celebrate it as part of a community in church, to join in the carols, look at the figures in the crib, and experience something of the peace that our coming together here brings. For many people this is the heart of Christmas, - the rest is trimmings, and to tell you the truth, I’d agree with them. Our celebration of the birth of Christ, here around the altar, is the reason for the season, the rest is window-dressing.

But that also means that we should do more than simply being present here. With Mary, we ought to take time to ponder this marvelous mystery, this incredible truth, that the child found here by shepherds, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laying in a manger, is the very Lord of lords and King of kings, - God our Creator, as well as Redeemer and Saviour.

A most unlikely story, a myth many people would say, an event that has been idealized beyond belief, that would have us bow before some plaster statues, and recognize in them the presence of God.

Yet that is what we do. We believe that by taking on our humanity, Jesus has shown us that we can be divine. He has shown us how far we can go, even in our humanity. We can love more, dare more, believe more and be more. Nothing is now outside the scope of our humanity, which after the birth of Jesus is no longer a limitation, but always an advantage.

This is why according to the letter to the Hebrews, God, who in olden days only through the prophets, messengers or messages, has finally and definitely spoken in and through his Son.

That is also why the oracle of Isaiah, which we heard in our first reading, - and which spoke about the joy of the exiles returning from their captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem, finds here its joyful fulfilment. Captivity and limitation have come to an end. Now only freedom and limitlessness are real.

Hence, Christmas is not merely the celebration of a historical birth, or a birth that took place over two thousand years ago. It is about becoming conscious of who we really are as human beings. It is the celebration of life in all its fullness. It is the celebration of the transformation of limit to limitlessness, of selfishness to selflessness, of bondage and fear to freedom and unconditional love.

That’s the message of Christmas, and that’s what we’ve come to celebrate as we come to pay our homage at the crib, not to some statues, but to God who is present here, blessing us with growth beyond imagination, when we choose to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and use his example as the pattern for our life.

May God, in Jesus, bless you this Christmas with all the grace you need to be truly his follower and disciple. Merry Christmas.