

+In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The Sundays following Christmas are often the runts of the liturgical litter. After major mid-week liturgies for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, the First Sunday after Christmas can be easily overlooked and missed by people. The Readings for the First Sunday after Christmas however help us to understand the events that we celebrate on December 24 and 25. Just as we should not be so quick to rush through Advent in our desire to celebrate Christmas, we should not rush through Christmas for the next thing (even if people are already setting off fireworks before New Year's, and even if Longs and Target already are putting out Valentine's Day stuff). We should take time and really look at our Christmas decorations and really listen to our Christmas hymns in order to contemplate and understand the mysteries that we celebrate every year, and the readings today help us to do so.

We are very quick to domesticate the story of Jesus' birth. It is the most well-known story in the New Testament: Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem and Jesus is born in a manger because there is no room at the inn. Angels appear to shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus, and they leave their flocks to witness this event. We have many forms of media that retell this, we have pageants to re-enact the story, and we have kitschy nativity sets that recreate the event. We can also swap out elements in the nativity sets to make it more humorous or precious including cat nativities, football nativities, sausage and cured meat nativities, and Star Wars nativities with little Baby Yodas as Jesus.

To be clear, pageants and other re-telling this story are not bad things in and of themselves (though the Baby Yoda nativity is a problem for a whole set of reasons). However, in domesticating the Nativity of Jesus, we lose track of the cosmic significance of this event—the Creator of the World, the Word of God, has entered into creation itself. He took on the physical elements of this world and became human. The Gospel of John tells us that the immaterial takes on the material, flesh, blood, bone, cells, and all the messy aspects of life. That very matter that Jesus takes on, our flesh and blood, become the very vehicle and garment of salvation, as Isaiah says, “he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.” Jesus takes on a body and takes on everything that comes with having a body, including those aches and pains we all know and love.

Paul says that Jesus came into the world in fullness of time, and in so doing came to a place and time. Psalm 147, in the parts we did not read says, “God is not impressed by the might of a horse and has no pleasure in the strength of a man.” Not only did the Word come into creation, he came in a specific place and time in history and entered the world in the most helpless and vulnerable way possible as an infant. Just as the creator of the world held creation in his arms, now the creator is held by his creation in the arms of his mother, Mary. His body has to be fed, protected, and cared for, and will grow up in a world where life for 99% of humanity is short, cruel, and poor. God chooses to become poor, and he enters into the world as a marginalized and oppressed person.

Though he will grow-up as a carpenter's child he still grew up as a poor *Peregrinus*, a non-citizen or foreigner under Roman Law. His home was conquered and occupied by the Roman Empire. Through the toil and sweat of their labour, the people of Galilee and Judea

served the Roman Empire under the watchful eye of the Roman Peace or Pax Romana which extracted heavy taxes from the poor to maintain the occupation over the land. The law and order of Galilee and Judea was maintained by the Roman legions who could extract labour or violence from the populace with little to no consequence. The King of the Universe comes into the world as a slave to a world and society that will reject him.

Once again, Psalm 147 says that God “sends out his command to the earth,” and authors the laws that govern creation, but now enters into the world to live as a subject to the commands and laws of creation and humanity. And yet, in the course of Jesus’ life, he causes, as Isaiah says, “righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.” He feeds the poor, he heals the sick and injured, and raises the dead. Not for profit, not for political maneuverings, but because it is the right thing to do. The laws of physics bend to his command because what is good, and right cannot be stopped by human limitations around supply and demand or the laws of physics even. His very presence draws attention and power away from the rich, the powerful, and the elite. He makes to poor, the widow, the orphan, the oppressed, the sex workers, and the most marginalized the centre of a new creation.

He gives freely that which is restricted in his society, health and prosperity exist for the wealthy and powerful, and yet Jesus gives it and more to the poor. “The Lord lifts up the lowly but casts the wicked to the ground.”

The Word of God, who came into the world as a newborn infant will as an adult experience the worst violence and horrors that humanity can inflict on it through his passion, crucifixion, and death because he spoke out and acted against the cruel injustices of the world around him. He is executed for treason and sedition against the Roman state and died as a duly convicted criminal under Roman Law. But once again, in the fullness of time, in human history, Jesus is resurrected from the dead, and ascends into heaven with the very same body that he was born into. He carries the scars and traumas, the aches and pains, and the limitations of that body into Heaven in his ascension. The fullness of the human experience that played out on Earth are now in Heaven. Through Jesus’ body and experience, Heaven and Earth are linked together. All of this was done according to Paul “in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.”

Our bodies too also bear the marks and scars of our history and traumas. Our bodies may also have been sites of violence where someone has done evil upon us. But that physicality is the garment of salvation. Those who are the most marginalized, and those who have experienced the hardships of human existence are the “crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of God” because Jesus became poor and lived and served among the most marginalized. They are his people. The scars borne by the poor do not go away but are held dearly by God and those who carry those scars become God’s children through the grace of Jesus Christ and become heirs of God’s promises for creation.

All this comes from God entering the world as a human child in a particular place, in a particular time, in a particular socio-economic class, and in a particular way. Each Christmas pageant, conventional nativity set, and Christmas hymn proclaim the story of the infinite entering into the finite world. It is such a small thing, but so often the course of human history turns on

the little things. The eyes of a child reflect the eternity of God because the eternity of God was a child, and the incarnation of Jesus as a human being brings hope that there will be vindication for the marginalized in this world.

Come and behold Him
Born the King of Angels!
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

Amen