

**CHRISTMAS EVE 2016**  
**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**TITUS 2.11 SAINT LUKE 2.1**



*On the First Day of Christmas, my true love sent to me...* is a popular Christmas carol first published in England in 1780... without music. The tune we are all familiar with dates back to 1909.

Each of the verses of the carol describes a gift given by “my true love” on the Twelve Days of Christmas. Each gift is increasingly more precious and valuable. On the Twelfth Day of Christmas we end up with many gifts.

Some historians and music scholars have looked for hidden meanings in the words. It has been suggested the carol was used as a catechism to teach the faith to Roman Catholic children at a time when it was illegal for them to practice their faith openly.

There is one element of truth the carol teaches us...and it's not just meant for children. The Church does celebrate Christmas for twelve days...commencing with tonight's Liturgy and continuing until the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6.

Throughout Advent we heard the prophecies from Isaiah and Malachi telling us the Savior was coming who would set things right between God and humankind. We heard John the Baptist's message...to get our hearts and minds and souls ready because Jesus is coming. Christmas is here...Jesus has arrived!

In the secularized and commercialized Christmas of shopping malls and Internet stores...Christmas trees and decorations will soon come down. After-Christmas sales will give way to the next big Hallmark event...Valentine's Day. But we're just getting started...our Christmas celebration has just begun...let's not be too quick to take down the Christmas tree and decorations.

Tonight we celebrate the birth of Jesus with hymns of joy and praise. The Christmas story needs to be told over and over again...to a world increasingly out of order and disordered...and in need of hearing about God's love and the peace and hope Jesus' birth brings to us.

The birth of Jesus is the story of the *INCARNATION*...God became a human being like us...born in a barn...the humblest of births. He is our *EMMANUEL*...*GOD WITH US*. He is the Light of John's Gospel...who leads the world out of darkness and sin and death. He walked among us so one day we might walk with him in heaven...forever.

It is a story we must not keep to ourselves...we must tell others. We must share the story of God's love for humankind...a love so deep we cannot fully understand its depth now...but a love that empowers and sustains us every day.

Tonight we join with the Angels and Saints of Luke's Gospel and shout *GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST HEAVEN, AND PEACE ON EARTH TO THOSE WITH WHOM HE IS PLEASED!*

Earlier this evening at the Mass for Children at the Crèche, the children helped decorate the Crèche with the figures of Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, the shepherds and animals. They told the story of Jesus' birth in simple yet powerful words that draw our attention to the Crèche.

The Crèche, as we have learned, is in itself highly instructive. Set every year on Christmas Eve, it remains through the Season of Epiphany.

We can learn much from children's eagerness to hear and share the Christmas story. Let's remember the enthusiasm and excitement we had at Christmastime when we were children. Let's share our enthusiasm and hope with others...in words and actions centered on God's love.

On the First Day of Christmas, God who is our real true love sent to us the greatest gift and most perfect present imaginable...his Son Jesus.

O come, Let us adore him!

