

CHRISTMAS EVE 2019
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
THE CRÈCHE TITUS 2.11 SAINT LUKE 2.1

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God does not speak to us in blazing flashes, but rather with a fragile flame, a baby...words spoken as we lighted the fourth candle on the Advent Wreath.

Our Advent Journey commenced four weeks ago with Isaiah's prophecy of hope...*the people who walked in darkness have seen a great Light; those who have walked in deep darkness, on the Light has shined.*

The Light who brings us out of darkness is Jesus...it his birth we celebrate that brings us together tonight...and it is the place of his birth...the Crèche we see before us...that makes his humble birth so remarkable.

Several years ago my former colleague and good friend, Father Rick Hobbs, taught in his Christmas Day homily...*the birth of Jesus was not a public "big deal" headline grabbing event...rather an obscure event in a small town...known only to a few shepherds.*

Doesn't it seem strange Jesus was born in a stable...he is, after all...our God and King? Had he been born in a palace surrounded by servants and rich splendor...the shepherds would not have been admitted to see him. Jesus would later say he didn't come to be served but to serve.

The Crèche is the focal point of our Christmas celebration. We are drawn to it...as the shepherds some 2000 years ago were...because of the story it tells...a story a disordered world needs to hear...a story that restores hope and brings a peace...God's peace...that passes our understanding.

But the Crèche is more than a beautiful decoration we set up in the church every Christmas. It is one bookend of our faith...one bookend in the life of Jesus...one bookend in the liturgical life of our parish family...the other is the cross. Both are vivid visual reminders Jesus came to us as a human being...a baby who would grow and mature into the man who would give his life for many.

With the birth of Jesus we celebrate with joy the *INCARNATION*...our *EMMANUEL*...our

GOD WITH US. God became a human being like us...he learned to walk among us...so we might one day walk beside him in heaven...forever. Jesus is the Light shining in darkness of Saint John's Gospel...a Light so powerful no darkness can ever extinguish.

The Light that is Jesus started as the fragile flame of a baby...and we are again drawn to the Crèche. Let's place ourselves inside the Crèche with the figures of Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. What do we see? We see a fragile child...who would be loved and nurtured by his parents...as our own parents love and nurture us. We are in awe by what we see. We pay attention to what the Angels tells us and shout...*GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST HEAVEN, AND PEACE ON EARTH TO THOSE WITH WHOM HE IS PLEASED!*

While the secularized and commercialized world of shopping malls and Internet stores are already taking down decorations and planning for after-Christmas sales...there is one thing we must always remember about Christmas...it does not end tonight when we sing *Silent Night*. Christmas is liturgically a twelve-day celebration concluding on the Epiphany...January 6. And we leave the Crèche up throughout the Epiphany Season...so we will not forget to tell the story about the birth of Jesus.

Before we leave here tonight...let's spend some time at the Crèche. And not just tonight...but throughout the Christmas and Epiphany Seasons...let's make a pilgrimage to the Crèche...and offer a prayer of thanks to God for giving us the most perfect Christmas gift...his Son, Jesus! After all...isn't that really why we are here tonight?

The Crèche is the most-powerful teaching tool at Christmas...and it is a symbol of the hope and peace Jesus brings into the world. It is that hope and peace that makes Jesus' birth a BIG DEAL and a message we can't keep to our selves. We must tell others...just as the shepherds did.

It's Christmas. Jesus is here. O come, Let us adore him! Christ our Lord! Now let's go tell others what we have seen.

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