

## **Christmas Day**

I celebrated the first Christmas Vigil Mass last night with a great number of children and their families. I invited them to gather around the crib with me and I asked the children many questions about the story of Christ's birth; who was involved in it and why it took place when and where it did. I was hoping to lead children into the heart of the mystery that we are celebrating here tonight.

It can be difficult for any of us to go to the heart of what Christmas can be for us. We talk about celebrating Christmas. But there is a danger that we spend so much time preparing for Christmas that we miss the opportunity to be truly present to the one whose birth we are celebrating. We can only celebrate if there is something present that can be celebrated. We can only celebrate Christmas when there is something new born here and now.

Jesus wants to gift us with his new born presence. But we must do our part to make that happen. And I think the secret is that we need to be real. Jesus wants to come to us as we are. It is no good pretending that everything is right in our lives when it is not. It is OK to bring before the Lord the brokenness and pain that we might be suffering. It is OK to say to Jesus that we find Christmas hard because it is a time when we miss those we love

who are no longer with us. Until we have done that, we can't really celebrate Christmas.

When we are honest with ourselves and know our needs then we can begin to notice what is happening here this morning. The Christmas story is no longer a story of the past but the story of what is happening now when Jesus comes to us again. The way that Luke tells the story of how Jesus came to be born invites us to be more than spectators of this event.

Luke invites us to make the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph. They took that long journey only because they had to. They had to fill in a form so that the government could tax them. Perhaps we don't want to be here either. But now that we are here let's be open to what might happen to us too. Mary and Joseph's reluctant journey meant that Jesus was to be born in the very town where his ancestor David had been born. Through Joseph he was of David's house and line.

Can we feel how Mary and Joseph must have felt when, so far away from home, they could not find a place for Mary to give birth to her son? They were homeless and alone and all they could find was a stable for shelter. For anyone who looked on and saw what was happening, the mystery was all hidden. Our God had chosen to live among us and there was nothing to be seen that would

unlock that mystery. Do we want that mystery to be unlocked for us this morning?

The secret of that mystery was made know at least to some people. The shepherds who took it in turn to look after their sheep during the night were among the poorest of the community. Like Mary and Joseph, they had nowhere they could call home. But it was to them that the heavenly messenger came. “The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round them.” That they were terrified hardly needs to be said. But the message that they were given was one that you and I can be so grateful for. “I bring news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.”

That message is really for us isn't it? The one who will save us has been born into our world. The one who will give meaning to our lives has come as a helpless child to share in all that makes us human. The one who is called Emmanuel has come to remain ever with us and to be there for us in whatever way we will need him. Now is our chance to speak to the new born child about some of the ways we need him.

The truth of the message of the angel would be confirmed to the shepherds when they saw a child

wrapped in bands of cloth lying in a manger. The truth of who Jesus is for us will be confirmed when we call upon him to be our saviour. We will know that he gives meaning to our lives when we call upon his help each day in prayer. We will know that he is our Emmanuel when we invite him to walk with us through the good times and the hard times that we experience.

We surround the celebration of Christmas with so many good things that can help us to know what it is that we are celebrating. No matter how beautiful the crib might be, no matter how moving our carols might be, the truth of what we are celebrating here tonight can only be known by people who are open to the gifts that Jesus wants to give to them. It is our faith in Jesus, in whatever way God choses to give that gift to us, that unlocks for us the mystery of why we are here. May the Lord deepen your faith in him. May the God whose birth we are celebrating touch your hearts and open them to the gift of his love and peace. May his birth bring you peace.