

Act of worship at home
Christmas Day, 25th December 2021

Reading Luke 2:1-14

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

Reflection

What we know about Mary comes primarily from the gospels of Matthew and Luke. And there are a few mentions of her when Jesus is an adult in the Gospel of John. We know the birth narratives as the Christmas Story and see it portrayed in Christmas pageants. It is good on this day to read part of Luke's account but I'm going to move to a different biblical source to focus on the meaning of Christmas in the opening verses of the Gospel of John. Using spiritual and even mystical poetry, he states:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...
What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it...
And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory...
full of grace and truth.

There is perhaps no greater imagery to reflect the understanding of God's sacred presence beyond us, with us, and within us than that of Light shining in dark places. Those dark places are certainly present in the world today and expressed through fear, ignorance, racism, conflict, disregard of the environment, poverty, and rejection of the 'other'.

The hope we acknowledge at Christmas is that the darkness will not overcome the Light of Christ. But if we're honest sometimes those places of darkness dwell within ourselves. Recognizing that darkness is an important step to finding acceptance of ourselves, as well as healing and wholeness for our own hearts and minds.

Yet there is even more good news. We understand the birth of Jesus as Emmanuel – God-with-us. The Word that was present at Creation itself was made flesh in the person of Jesus, the Light of the World. That means that instead of envisioning God only as "out there" and "other," we can now experience God right here with us!

The astonishing fact is that same Light of Christ dwells within each one of us. That means that during times of personal darkness, you and I can cling to the promise of that Sacred Light overcoming the darkness within ourselves. So the next time we sing or hear Joy to the World, expand that meaning to also include Joy to You and Me. And let's not forget to let that Light within us shine before others. This is cause to rejoice, indeed. Amen.

Prayer

Loving God,

As we think of Mary, we pray for all mothers today:

for those for whom motherhood has brought joy, for those who have struggled with the responsibility, for those whose children are ill, for those who have been separated from those they gave birth to, and for those unable to have children.

God of the stable and of every home, shed light in darkness, and bring joy, hope and peace.

Remembering Joseph, we pray for all fathers struggling to provide for their children;

for those rejoicing as they watch their children grow up.

God of the stable and of every home, shed light in darkness, and bring joy, hope and peace.

We pray for all those newly born as they develop and discover and learn, and grow.

We pray for all children celebrating the joy of Christmas and for those in danger.

God of the stable and of every home, shed light in darkness, and bring joy, hope and peace.

We pray for our families, and our homes: may they be filled with understanding, acceptance, love and the spirit of Christmas. Amen.

Hymn

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
all seated on the ground,
the angel of the Lord came down,
and glory shone around.

'Fear not,' said he (for mighty dread
had seized their troubled mind),
'glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and all mankind.

'To you in David's town this day
is born of David's line
a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord;
and this shall be the sign:

'the heavenly Babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all meanly wrapped in swathing-bands,
and in a manger laid.'

Thus spake the seraph; and forthwith
appeared a shining throng
of angels, praising God, who thus
addressed their joyful song:

'All glory be to God on high,
and to the world be peace!
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to earth
begin and never cease!'



Blessing

Let us go into the day to celebrate God-with-us, let us go to share God's compassion with all people, let us go in peace to live in God's joy. Let us go with his blessing today and everyday. Amen.