

Christmas Homily
Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul
December 25, 2011
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The mystery of the Lord's birth is a mystery played out in the real world of human beings, our world. As we reflect on the various players in this, the greatest of all mystery plays, we might wonder what was in their minds.

What do you suppose was in the mind of Caesar Augustus as he summoned everyone to a regional registration? It was an immense undertaking. Was he preoccupied with his political position, with the need to control those under his rule demanding everyone to travel to his home place to register? (He was lucky he wasn't a part of the endless stream of debates!)

What was in the mind of Joseph? Was he still pondering the dreams that led him to accept his young, pregnant bride as his wife? Was he naturally preoccupied with Mary's welfare wondering where they would stay, if their journey would be safe?

And what about Mary? What was in her mind as they made this physically draining journey in the final days of her pregnancy? Was she preoccupied with the welfare of the child inside her? Would they be in the wilderness when her time came? Would there be anyone to help her, care for her and her infant? Was she preoccupied with the mystery of her child that came about through the message of an angel and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit?

Shepherds. They lived on the periphery of life doing dirty work and held in suspicion by the cleaner, nine-to-fivers of the day. Chances are that they were preoccupied with potential thieves, errant, wandering sheep, and ever lurking wolves.

All of these persons of the birthing story of Christ had their preoccupations right up to the moment of Jesus' birth. Suddenly, angels surrounded them announcing Glory in the midst of the dark night. They, too, were preoccupied by the God they served, and the light that was a piercing shaft of hope filled light shining through the heart beat of a tiny newborn infant.

The angels reassured their stunned and terrified hearers whose lives would never be the same. News of great joy now found a home in the unsuspecting hearts of shepherds who rarely shared in anything good much less great. God came to such as these first. In their terrified state, they angel assured them with the message, "Do not be afraid," the same words the Risen Savior would speak to his equally terrified disciples. Walking through the locked doors of their own hearts preoccupied with fears, doubts and lingering grief, Jesus the Christ, crucified and raised, coaxed out of these followers tentative trust and the possibility of belief for their new life.

And us; what about us? What we celebrate today is not a cozy memory from an ancient event life looking through a photo album of happy days gone by. What we celebrate is the continuous rebirthing of Christ in, with and through our lives. Our very human hearts are mangers longing to cradle the sacred infant of longed for peace who will see us through our own preoccupations of daily life.

Our hearts may be preoccupied with conflicts around the world, and our troops coming and going. There are those among us who are preoccupied with the joy of new life in our families. There are those among us today, who have suddenly, through the death of a loved one, have come to know the self-invited house guest of grief and sorrow. There are those among us who are preoccupied with the fear of loosing jobs, and others facing rejection from those thought to be trustworthy.

How do we birth the savior today? The titles given the Messiah in the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah give us direction. Isaiah speaks of the savior as the “wonder-counselor, God-hero, Father forever and Prince of Peace. Jesus is a wonder-counselor whose wisdom guides us through the mazes of our human journey teaching us not to rely solely on human analysis, but true wisdom born out of trust in God. Jesus is the God-hero calling our attention constantly to the important of the cross where upon he became our hero in death and our hero in new life. Jesus is the Father-forever, a father, a mother, a parent ready to sacrifice for the sake of the children. Jesus is the Prince of Peace offering a new perspective on ruling, not by bullying but by being vulnerable, not by overwhelming those in his charge, but by seeking the welfare of those who seek a new leadership of compassion.

If we are to continue to birth the savior, his Isaiah given titles call us to be dispensers of his wisdom in the heroic way we live each day. We are parents of the savior’s new life as we accept sacrifice that strips away illusions of human pride and leaves us with a clean spirit free to love with fewer and fewer expectations of return. We birth our savior as we become more and more the makers of peace in our relationships with family, friends, enemies and strangers.

This kind of birthing accepts our human condition as the manger of Christ’s dwelling among us. It is a birthing of the savior that echoes the words of the angel to us whatever our preoccupations, “do not be afraid.” The glory of God comes to our lips not because all our doubts are assuaged and our questions answered, but because the Savior seeks us out and desires us, loves us and wants our love.

Christmas brings us the grace of this birthing instilling in us, grace by grace, the truth that we are never, never alone.