

A.M.D.G.

Homily, Mass of the Nativity of the Lord at Night, 2017

“Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.”

This is a truly amazing proclamation of the angels: What makes this news so great? Why should we care about a child born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago? What does that have to do with us today?

To answer that question we must remember the Christian story. We hear many different stories today in our culture. There are many competing narratives of who human beings are and what they should be doing. We hear the narrative of cultural decline, things in our society going from bad to worse and how we should stop it, or its dialectical opposite, the narrative of technological progress, where we should strive to progress in all areas of life until we solve all the world's problems and build the perfect society. Or there is the more common narrative among young people today, that we create our own story, we write our own narrative of reality unconstrained by the shackles of the past. None of these are the Christian story. The child born to us did not come to stop the decline and fall of Western civilization, or to bring about a perfect society, or even to affirm our own personal quests for self-fulfillment. But if it is none of these things, is the Christian story relevant to us? Does it matter? Let us see.

This story begins at the beginning. God created the entire universe, vast and intricate, with billions of galaxies and trillions of planets, all held together by an incredible balance of elemental forces and laws. God shaped the universe to bring forth life, and then intelligent life, through a series of processes and developments, complex and subtle. Then God invited these intelligent beings to communion with him. He had this beautiful idea that they could share in His own life, and draw nourishment from His inaccessible light. But they had other ideas. They did not want to serve His plan, they wanted to make their own. The first humans, and we ourselves all too often, did not want to take their place in the enormous tapestry of the unfolding design of the creator. They wanted to create their own reality, and control their own story. Thus they broke from God, the source of all light, and found themselves plunged into the darkness of their own making. They wandered about in this darkness, not knowing really where they were going, and more and more driven by greed and lust and pride. Some became embroiled in war, others stayed in peace. Some suffered greatly from cruelty and tyranny, others kept out of the way. Some tried to fix human

problems, others made them worse. New technologies did not make humans more moral, and new ideas made societies more confused. No matter where one looked, one saw a broken world. God tried to intervene through prophets, but the message was ignored or distorted. But all was not lost.

For as the Holy Trinity looked down upon this sad scene, and saw humanity falling over itself in the shadows of its own wickedness, they decreed from eternity that the Son would enter into that maze of iniquity and show people the way out of it. 'I will go to them,' He said, 'I will become one of them and teach them the truth and show them the way to life. I will save them.' And so, in the most incredible plot twist ever, the creator himself became the creature. Backstage of the action He divested Himself of divine glory, he emptied Himself of His power, and clothed himself in humility and weakness. This was no *deus ex machina*, but rather a *deus in carne*, God into the flesh, the incarnation. At first no one recognized him. They thought he was a poor carpenter. Eventually His light became visible to the world, and pushed back the darkness. All those who could bear looking at the light were drawn toward it, and found the way to life.

That is what we celebrate tonight. In this child in Bethlehem we meet our creator hidden in human form. He did not hesitate to make himself the weakest and most vulnerable of beings, sharing in our own frail state, hungry, cold, fragile, so as to lead us with His light out of the prison we humans created for ourselves. This is incredible! Who can fathom it? What mystery! What joy! Let us meditate on this immense mystery tonight, and marvel at God's wonders.

In all this the story came with another twist. The Son entrusted himself to a young, humble woman, to bear him and raise him and love him. She proved so strong and pure and faithful. In Mary we see the new humanity embracing the wonders of God's plan for all. We must, with her, enter into the mystery of this night. We are not called first and foremost to be more kind and more generous at Christmas, we are called to submit our very selves to the will of God, to let the Christian story take hold of us. We are called to enter into that marvelous exchange, for God became human so that humans may participate in God. We must draw close to the Christ child, not in fear, but in joy, and in that loving embrace let go of our own will to build our own reality and write our own story. Rather, let us become, like Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, serving the babe in the cave. Let the Christian story become our story, and let us play our role in that marvelous narrative that spans the whole of history and all of creation, letting it be done unto us according to His Word.