

# Christmas 2018 Day

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At Christmas the Church provides three different sets of readings and prayers for Mass, each with a slightly different focus. The first Mass at Midnight sets before us the details of how Jesus came to be born in a lowly stable in Bethlehem and includes the message of the angel to the shepherds. The second or Dawn Mass gives us the response of the shepherds as they go into Bethlehem to find out for themselves and worship the new-born King. Both focus on the human reality of what it means for God to come down on earth and share our nature in the Incarnation. The stories appeal to our emotions – our heart strings. God knows that unless we accept as true the reality of God taking to himself our human nature in a concrete time and place, and unless we do so not just with our intellect but with our emotions and every fibre of our being, the birth of Jesus will have no power to change us or through us the world in which we live.

St John takes all this for granted but he also wants us to reflect on its meaning and to understand the significance of the Christmas story. He does not begin his Gospel with stories about the birth of Jesus as both St Luke and St Matthew do. Instead he begins with the creation of the universe. “In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Everything that exists came into being through the eternal Son of God. He is the Word who gives form to the Father’s thoughts and will. God breathes forth the Holy Spirit through the Son and gives life to the created order and especially to the first human beings.

Why does St John tell us this? Because this same eternal Son of God, the Word, is the one who comes into the world to bring light and hope. His own people did not accept him but “to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to all who believe in the name of him who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself. The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father.”

When we take to heart on these words we see the stable in which Jesus is born in a new way. It is the same story but told from the point of view of God rather than through the eyes of human beings. We are not simply celebrating the birthday of a great man. We are not simply celebrating what it is to be a child although love and openness of a child gives us hope. The child Jesus will grow up to be a man who preaches a controversial message and will be put to death for his claims. We are celebrating the fact that God has become one of us. Jesus is truly human yet completely united to God – one person both divine and human. Life has a meaning and a purpose. God has a plan for each of us. He is not far from us. We can reach out and touch him – precisely what we do when we receive him in Holy Communion. He enables us to become children of God. By nature we are only human but his gift of grace makes us one with God. This above all is the cause of our joy and celebration today.