

# Christmas Day 2017

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Today the Church gives us three different sets of Mass texts. The Masses of Midnight and Dawn present the familiar and very human story of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and the awe-filled visit of the shepherds. The Mass of Christmas Day gives us instead the beginning of St John's Gospel quite different in character. Instead of looking at the Christmas story from a human point of view we are invited to reflect on it from God's perspective. Some of the elements are the same. Light shines in the darkness. The glory of the Lord comes down among us. The Son of God is not welcomed by his own people but transforms those who do welcome him so that we become part of the family of God.

The Church offers us this reading because she wants us to understand the full meaning of Christmas. We are not simply celebrating the birthday of some great figure in human history nor even the mystery of childhood and joy at a new human life. Jesus does not stay a baby. He grows up and eventually gives his life for us on the cross. What we are celebrating above all is God coming into our world in a definitive way. God has become one of us by taking on human flesh, not just a time but, through the Resurrection, for eternity.

Life and existence have a meaning. St John calls Jesus the Word. The Son of God came into our world at Christmas but he was with the Father in the beginning. It was through him that the Father brought everything into being and sent the Spirit to bring life. Jesus is the one who helps us discover the meaning and purpose of life. God is not a remote being unconcerned about mere human beings or this world. God is good. God is very close to us. We can call to him. We can reach out to him. We can even touch him for he reaches out to touch us. The Jesus who comes to us in the Mass and in Holy Communion is the same Jesus who was born in a stable, lay in the manger, gave his life for us on the cross and rose from the dead at Easter.

In his hymn to the Blessed Sacrament Fr Faber wrote: "Ah, see, within a creature's hand the vast Creator deigns to be, reposing, infant-like, as though on Joseph's arm, or Mary's knee." We can be too worldly wise to welcome Jesus with this simplicity of heart. We are too sophisticated to hear the angels singing. We want to run our own lives. God seems threatening or boring – an irrelevance! God does not want to leave it at that. He wants a relationship with us. He came as a child to break down our isolating pride. How could the love of a child reaching out to us not speak to our hearts? Let the child in all of us reach out in joy to the child in the manger and make the words of St John our own: "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, full of grace and truth."