

**The Nativity of Our Lord – Year A – December 25, 2010 - Homily**  
**Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; John 1:1-14**  
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In one of G.K. Chesterton's priest-detective stories featuring Father Brown, as he reveals the main suspect who is masquerading as a priest, Father Brown affirms that in both theology and in life, "Reason and justice grip the remotest and loneliest star." While the Gospel of John is sometimes considered to be the mystic's gospel, there is plenty in today's reading that is earthly in its pronouncement, and practical in its inference.

Today we celebrate the birth into the world of the Logos, or Word of God, through whom God created the whole universe. In Greek philosophy the word *logos* was used for the logical rationality behind the universe. Later, as our beliefs developed, *logos* is complemented by Wisdom, who we now understand to be the Holy Spirit, and who according to the Book of Proverbs was present with God the Father and the Logos in creation. Through the Word of God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the whole universe and everything that is in it came into being, and now He has entered His own creation, as the Word made flesh, to be with His people. The world is filled with the Word, bears witness to the Word, and finds its structure, function and coherence in and through Him.

The realities being presented so eloquently in the prologue of John's gospel are nothing less than the nature of the world, as we know it, and God's intentions towards that world. In expressing God's creation of the world, and the presence of the Word with God from beyond time, we know that God's loving intentions towards His creation have always been part of God's plan, from the very beginning. God did not send His only Son to be our savior as a kind of last-ditch effort. From the very beginning of creation, God knew that there would also be a new beginning in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Consistent with the themes of the Book of Genesis, John names the Word as the light and life of all people, and then reminds us of a stark reality of our fallen nature. John says, "Yet the world did not know him". It is still true today. Those who are of the world have used this season of Christ's coming as an excuse to fill themselves with snowmen, jingle bells, elves and reindeer, Santa Claus and presents under the Christmas tree. Perhaps peripherally, like a fleeting sideways glance, some have felt a stirring deep in their hearts of something more, of Jesus Christ, the greatest gift of all. Yet with all that other stuff filling the picture, is there even room for Christ? The mystic Evelyn Underhill reminds us that "human nature is like a stable inhabited by the ox of passion and the ass of prejudice; animals which take up a lot of room and which, we are probably all feeding on the side. And it is there between them, pushing them out, that Christ must be born and laid in their very manger. Sometimes Christians seem far nearer to those animals than to Christ in his simple poverty, self-abandoned to God." (End quote.)

Humanity has strayed a long way from God's gift of reason and call to justice, whatever might be happening in distant stars. Reason now masks itself as rationalization, in order for us to rewrite God's desire for our lives into our own playbook. Justice has become a sham, with the most powerful nations, people and the systems they create, continuing to dominate those who cannot compete educationally and economically, politically and technologically. For you and me, as followers of Christ, John reminds us that we have "received him, believed in his name" and have also received power to become children of God. So how do we shine the light of Christ on false reason and shameful injustice? Blessed with the power to become children of God, we can be sure that the

driving force for our transformation is also a gift from God. Christ empowers us, and Christ is here with us. God is a personal and present force in the world for good, not some impersonal and uncaring deity. Martin Luther calls Christ the “mirror of the Father’s heart”. Jesus comes to the world so that we might know and understand God’s nature, right down to His heart of love. If Christ is the mirror, we have to ask ourselves how our lives reflect Him through our words and deeds, through our own increasing capacity for love and grace. In our ongoing transformation, is God helping us to kick out the ox of passion and the ass of prejudice, to make more room for Christ in our hearts? In Christ, we begin today, and every day, with all we need in order to unlearn the bad habits of the world, and to learn Christ’s way of light and truth, of love and peace. Our mission in Christ is to continue the work He began, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Word born in us anew is the power to change lives, and change the world. The power of the Word made flesh, rewrites, and regenerates our true desire for reason and God’s justice.

At the end of today’s Gospel reading, we read that the Word comes to us full of grace and truth. The gracious gift of God is His son, Jesus Christ. The gracious act of receiving Christ into the cradle of our hearts is a profound act of hospitality. Sharing Christ by *practicing God’s graciousness* is also about hospitality. As followers of Jesus, we are witnesses to God’s grace, as we lift high the Light of Christ in this dark world. With God’s grace comes God’s truth. What truth might this little baby, born in poverty, to an unwed teenager hold for us? What does any baby have at their birth? We all come into the world with nothing, except the air in our lungs, as a sign of God’s gift of life. As children of God, perhaps this is a good day to remember that we too have nothing apart from God’s good pleasure, God’s gifts of grace. Jesus was born into material poverty, but spiritually He is the richest human being that ever walked the earth. The circumstances of Jesus’ birth point to His radical solidarity to the poorest of society in all meanings of the word. We too are invited to demonstrate the same kind of love, care and affection for humanity as God demonstrates for us in the Incarnation. May God direct *our* passions to align with His passionate desire for mercy. May the Lord Jesus transform *our* prejudices by breaking down barriers with the same kind of unconditional love and compassion that He freely gives in His life and ministry here on earth. May we never forget the face of Christ, and the riches of His love, because of worldly distractions, and our pursuit of earthly riches. Today is a great day to look around, and really see the face of Christ in others, as we remember that we bear witness to God, as the face of Christ in and to the world.

Again, from Evelyn Underhill, “God speaks in a baby boy and reverses all our pet values. He speaks in our language and shows us his secret beauty on our scale.... We have got to begin ... [with the] humble recognition that human things can be holy, full of God; ... that all life is engulfed in him and he can reach out to us anywhere at any level.” The birth of Jesus is the miraculous gift of God’s grace and truth. In the wisdom of Chesterton’s Father Brown, “The most incredible thing about miracles is that they happen.” Merry Christmas everyone!

Amen.