



Father Joseph's Outline for Christmas Eve

Luke 2:1-20 – Wednesday 12/24/2008

“...to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger.” (Luke 2:5-7)

- By celebrating the birth of the Christ we are celebrating the coming of God to His people!
- The birth of the Christ is not a symbolic or a mythological event. It is a *real* event!
- According to the Holy Scriptures, Christmas is nothing less than **God Himself** coming in the flesh. Any other belief is a terrible compromise of this great accomplishment.
- Christmas is a real historical event. It happened at a specific point in time and in a specific geographical location. Jesus Christ was born from a specific woman. This event was proclaimed by angels and prophecies and was witnessed by specific people.

Examining the Icon of the Nativity

The Mother of God

- Mary is clearly the largest figure. She takes a focal spot in the icon.
 - This emphasis on her figure is alluding to the unlimited mystery that is the “**Ancient of Days**” which was contained in her womb.
- Mary is depicted to be deep in thought.
 - This reflects what the Evangelist said: “Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19).
- What are these things that she kept in her heart?
 - The message of the Archangel Gabriel when he visited her and told her about this awesome mystery: “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David” (Luke 1:16-17) .
 - The vision of the shepherds, which they had reported, “When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us’” (Luke 2:15).

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- As the mystery continued to be revealed over time, Mary continued to ponder these things, such as the words of Simeon the righteous, who blessed them and said to Mary, “Behold this child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34). He also told her (referring to the crucifixion), “A sword will pierce through your own soul” (Luke 2:35).

Other Figures

- Next to Mary there is a manger, shaped in the form of a tomb and surrounded by the dark cave.
- The swaddling cloths in which the baby Jesus is wrapped are very similar to the shroud in which He was later wrapped by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus for His burial.
- Next to the manger stand the animals who, according to the prophecy of Prophet Isaiah, knew the identity of Him who was there while the people themselves did not: “Hear, O heaven, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: ‘I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider’” (Isaiah 1:2-3).
- The choir of the angels can be seen conversing with the shepherds about this mystery.
 - “And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’” (Luke 2:10-11).
 - “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind!’” (Luke 2:13-14).
 - “The Lord will raise a King out of David’s house who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.” (Jeremiah 23:5)
 - “Out of Bethlehem shall come a ruler who will be the shepherd of Israel.” (Micah 5:2)
- The Magi (or the wise men) appear on the side of the icon as they travel, and their sight is focused on the star at the top of the icon pointing to Jesus. This fulfilled the prophecy that said “a star will come out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17).
- The Magi, with their gifts that they will present to the Child, fulfill another prophecy: “The kings of distant lands will present him gifts” (Psalm 72:10).
- Joseph looks very deep in thought as confusion and doubt had crept into his heart about the purity of Mary the Virgin and the Mother of God.
 - “When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’” (Matthew 1:18-21)

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Important

The incarnation of God in the flesh gives us a new opportunity to regain our lost identity and re-enter into the eternal life that we have lost because we have become enslaved to sin.

The birth of the Christ is the utmost way of communication between God and His people, as He spoke, not through people in words or by signs of nature, but by Himself through His only-begotten Son, the Creator of the ages.

The baby of the manger is not a usual or ordinary kind of baby; He is the Almighty God that came to grant us a new life and to give it to us abundantly: “For behold a child has born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and his name is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, I confess that You are the one who holds the universe by the power of Your hands. Heaven and earth are the works of Your own hands. You came into the world, born of a Virgin, and laid in a manger for my salvation. I beseech You, O Lord, to enlighten the depth of my soul in the same way that You enlightened the darkness of Your tomb. Send Your everlasting light, O Lord, into my heart and make it a pure place to host You, in the same way You deemed the manger worthy of Your glory, together with that of Your eternal Father and Your all-holy and compassionate Spirit. Amen.

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