

2018 Christmas Morning Mass

1. **Even though most of us gathered here this morning did not hear the Gospel proclamation at midnight Mass**, yet like those shepherds we must become watchers of the night in order to be good watchers of the day! So let us sew together the two Gospels with the help of an image. Being one family of God, some of us are going to tell you what we saw yesterday while you were asleep! Those shepherds like us wanted to share something wonderful with you: “Not only did **we see a new born infant and a choir of angels praising the Lord**, but this infant was drinking from its Mother. And if you looked closely” - and now they get excited - “the baby never drew away its gaze from its mother all the while!” And if you are a mother with a sucking child, you may wonder if these shepherds have ever seen a mother feeding her infant! But the point is that the image anticipates the message of the Gospel and the mystery of Christmas: **The mother and her divine child are locked in a gaze of mutual love and receptivity.**

2. **John, when he writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God**, and the Word was God” expresses the relationship between God and the Word as one of distinction (the Word was with God) and unity (the Word was God). The distinction is that the Word and God are different persons but the unity is that they are both God, not

two gods but one God. **The analogy of a mother and a child help us to understand this mystery.** The mother and the child are two distinct persons, but they are both human beings. The only difference is that the mother has her flesh and the child has his, but the Father and the Son share the same divine substance. **The joy is that they are locked in a mutual gaze of love!**

3. **Don’t check out because it sounds like a theology class.** Let the excitement of St. John the Evangelist obsess you: “In the beginning there was this relationship, and unimaginable fire of love, between God and his Word: the Word was turned “toward” God’s face, and this turning was reciprocated. So there are two. On the other hand, there is a unity: the Word was God. Everything that God is, the Word is: they are one – and yet two!”¹ To grasp a tiny portion of this original mystery of Christmas is to become a “watcher of the day.” All this began with the sign that the angel gave the Shepherds: the Mother and the Child.

4. **A mother and her child enjoy only a short period of this mutual locked gaze.** John tells us that the Word and his Father enjoy an eternally locked gaze of communion of love: He was in the beginning with God: God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made. **Imagine if the Mother and the Child were locked in this face to face**

¹ Francis Martin and William M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015) 32-41.

surrender and you will see how this sign of the mother and the Child anticipates the Christmas mystery.

4. Why the Christmas Mystery? Because “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.” This mystery of God gazing on God was a locked door, an inaccessible secret of God himself. But why did he then make it known? Because he is love and love desires to be known and loved back! **Yes, love desires to be known and loved! So he breaks open the divine sanctuary hidden from all eternity and lifts the veil of his hiddenness at Bethlehem:** “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; **we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.**” **This is Christmas!**

5. Is God selfish, that he desires to be loved back? No. Not at all. God made all things so that they could share in this eternal communion of love as he does: all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” Some of the most traumatic events in our life happen when we are tiny babies, just born. If we are separated from our mothers for a long period of time we can be scarred for life. Why? **Because babies know instinctively that they are made for communion and bonding. It’s the DNA of our relationships, this bond of the Father with his Son.** God opens this up to us again because something happened that so obscured it that we think to live with evil and alienation and loneliness and unhappiness is normal. **It’s not normal. Christmas is normal!**

6. We had forgotten, lost our purpose. We no longer knew why we were created so we didn’t know how to live. We were all created in him and for him but we thought we came from our own willing and were created for ourselves. How did this happen? In the fourth Gospel, darkness is a symbol for sin, a condition of alienation from God. This darkness came through the envy of the Devil and would have been permanent, had not God shattered its stranglehold forever with the birth of his Son: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” But the devil obscured it almost completely: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.” (Gen 3:6-7) And the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil. (1 Jn 3:8)

How? By inviting us to receive him at Christmas: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” In other words, we share in God’s own friendship that was hidden for all ages.

And from this fullness of his relation with his Father have we all received, grace upon grace. This grace is the share in that bond that locks the Father and Son in an eternal bond of friendship and is reflected in Mary and Jesus’ mutual gaze. **So our garment is complete. The Eucharist sews together the**

heavenly and the earthly garment, the human and divine relationships of the Son with his Father and the Son with us.

Being watchmen of the day is the safeguard and preserves this Christmas gift in our own souls, in our families and in our society. This is Christmas! This is the wonderful meaning of the sign given to the shepherds and opened to each of us believers! Blessed Christmas!