

## 2019 Christmas Day

1. **It's hard to describe the joy and exultation** of this day, so great is its message and content. What would you think if we sang the Exultet on Christmas day, as we sing it on Easter night? You know that Easter Sunday has a Palm Sunday that precedes it. On that Palm Sunday the whole city was stirred and the people cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!...Hosanna in the highest!" (Mk 11:9-10) **On Christmas day, likely the whole city was stirred by those enthusiastic shepherds who left the crib in haste amazed by what they had seen.**

2. **Today's first reading is like the Exultet for Christmas.** In four magnificent strophes, the prophet describes the coming of the Lord of hosts to the holy City of Zion. "The vision of the coming of Israel's Lord and King (Is 40:9-10) fills his mind with ecstatic excitement. His mood is exultant" (Interpreter's Bible, Vol. V. pp. 610).<sup>1</sup> The great theme of the Hebrew religion is described here. God is a warrior in battle for Israel. The messengers wait anxiously for news from the field of battle. From the city wall the people watch for the feet of the messenger. They spy him! He is running! Leaping over the mountains! He is drawing near.

3. **He is stripped for battle:** "The Lord bares his holy arm." (Isa 52:10) But the message and "the theophany is universal, world-wide in its range, and it comes at the end, fulfilling the

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<sup>1</sup> George A. Buttrick, ed., *Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Song of Songs, Jeremiah*, IB 5 (New York: Abingdon, 1956) 610.

whole of Israel's history and tradition" (Interpreter's Bible, Vol. V. pp. 610). He is doing this "in the sight of all the nations." (Isa 52:10) The Lord spoke to Moses "mouth to mouth" and "face to face;" (Num 12:8) then **he wished to speak to "the ruins of Jerusalem" (Isa 52:9) and now he speaks to "the ends of the earth" face to face, in Person!** (Isa 52:10) Such is the "Exultet" of Christmas Day! God himself is King of his people even as he is a babe in the manger. **He comes himself to save us from our sins.**

3. **The Letter to the Hebrews, too offers us this grand sweep of Israel's history and God's dealings with her.** "The Son of God is the center of the whole plan of salvation and the key that unlocks the meaning of all that God has done until now".<sup>2</sup> He is the prophet who is the final spokesman for God; he is the priest who alone could accomplish the one purification that cleansed us from our sins; and he is the King who sits at the throne of God's right hand in glory. It is easy to overlook how astounding all these truths of Christmas are and pass over them. God has spoken to us, God is purifying us and God is ruling us. We can get so comfortable with our worship that it no longer cuts to the heart or evokes in us the awe and wonder of what we celebrate. **God has come to battle for us in person.**

4. On Christmas Day, the Liturgy also tries to lift up our hearts and minds to **another dimension of the babe in the crib**, to his divine and majestic nature. St. John the Apostle wants us

<sup>2</sup> Mary Healy, *Hebrews*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016) 33.

to make this mystery of God, his transcendence, his power and love, our own. “He presents the heart of the mystery and the cause of our becoming the “children of God”: **the Word became flesh.**”<sup>3</sup> The Word of God which for all eternity dwelt with God the Father, which for all eternity was turned to him face to face, now comes to us, becomes completely human in Jesus Christ. He turns to us face to face even while gazing on the Father face to face. **He wants us to draw us into this face to face relationship with the Father.**

5. **And, what is more, John tells us that the Word of God, dwelling for all eternity in God, buys acreage in our neighbourhood** and constructs his home: “He made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14) so that we could always know his address and visit him whenever we wished. This mystery infinitely surpasses our comprehension. Yet in order to lay hold of it as ordinary Christians, we need to incarnate this mystery in our lives, denying neither his total and true humanity nor his total and true divinity. **We can assist ourselves in several ways.**

6. **First, to spend time in silence to contemplate the Word of God.** Silent prayer with the Word lifts our eyes to the divine nature of the Child of Bethlehem: “No one has seen God, the only begotten Son who was in the bosom of the Father has made him known.” (Jn 1:18)

7. **Second, to frequent the sacraments.** They join heaven and earth. Just as the Spirit came down upon Mary and incarnated the Son of God, so the same Spirit comes upon the gifts of the altar and transforms them into the very Body and Blood of Christ. We are a sacramental people because of the Incarnation. And as we frequent the sacraments, we not only become co-inhabitants with the human and divine nature of the Son of God, we become more fully members of his sacred humanity. **The sacraments are a door to the mystery of the Incarnation. He comes to us in person. In confession we hear his voice, in marriage blessed by him, we see his face in our spouse.**

8. **Finally, by devoutly attending Mass.** In Holy Communion Jesus comes to us in person to be within us. He gives us to understand that if we can find him in the Eucharist, then **we can find his face in our neighbour.**

9. In and through us he extends this amazement of his incarnation through time. Then indeed, through us the “Exultet” becomes our own: **“All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.”**

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Martin and William M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015) 32-41.