

Christmas Day Mass 2021

1. Last night the liturgy offered us the Christmas mysteries through the eyes and ears of the shepherds and the lonely cave of Bethlehem. Their experience echoes that of the prophets. “Your words were formed and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord God of Hosts.” (Jeremiah 15:16) What is eaten is taken in, assimilated into the HEART! This morning the Church urges us to go up upon the heights, upon the mountains, like a watchman and catch a glimpse of the divine majesty of this Child; “Your watchmen raise their voices, they shout for joy together, for they see the Lord face to face, as he returns to Zion.” From Bethlehem to Zion, from the humanity to the divinity of Jesus Christ, our Child-Messiah, our Messiah-God.

2. A watchman is also one who habitually stands upon the heights – a contemplative man with a contemplative glance. On this Christmas morning, in her choice of Saint John’s prologue, Holy Mother Church is eager to share her contemplative glance with us so that we can make it our own.

3. When we were children and young teenagers, on Saturday mornings we used to crowd into our parents’ double bed. Each of us three youngest of the six would grab a spot near them just to be with them. In a sense we returned to the marriage bed where we had been conceived, without knowing it. Mom and Dad would patiently tolerate this early morning inconvenience.

4. In an analogous way the Church returns to her beginnings, where she was conceived in the heart of the Most Blessed Trinity. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) We need a watchman to help us re-enter that chamber where we were each predestined to belong to Jesus Christ.

We need a watchman to open up the ineffable and lofty conversation that passed between the Eternal Father and his Only Begotten Son. Who could possibly do this for us?

5. St. John of the Cross opens for us such a poetic possibility in one of his poems on the Incarnation. I quote a few verses that poetically capture the Divine conversation between the Father and the Son, just before the Word becomes flesh! [St. John of the Cross. *Poems*, Translated by Roy Campbell. Penguin Classics: London 1960. P. 89]

Romance VII

The Son then answered to the Father,
My will is Yours and Yours alone,
And the Glory that I shine with,
Is My will to work Your own.

That which Your Grace says, O My Father,
In everything appears the best
Since most clearly in this manner
Can your Kindness be professed.

Thus your omnipotence, and justice,
And wisdom will be well descried,
I will tell it to the world,
And spread the tidings far and wide
Of Your beauty, power, and sweetness
In one sovereignty allied.

I will go now to seek My bride,
And take on My shoulders strong
The cares, the weariness, and labours
Which she has suffered for so long.

And that she may win new life

I myself for her will die,
Rescue her from the burning lake,
And bear her back to You on high.

6. The reason for offering you this exquisite meditation on the conversation of the Word of God with his Father is that this is the very bedroom dialogue of the Word with the Father at Bethlehem, and he opens up that conversation permanently to us. Lest we shy away from such a lofty conversation as something too far above our vocation St. John assures us: “But to all who did accept him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” (John 1:12) That is to say, the shepherds of Bethlehem cry to the watchmen of Zion, “Yes he wants us to begin this face to face conversation in the heart!” He wants to be with us to share his own divine nature through the grace of Baptism.

7. At Christmas, through these liturgical celebrations he uncovers our resistances.

- The Son of David comes to his own city, but has to be born in a stable.
- He comes to his own people and they do not want him.
- He enters into the world, but he is not listened to, not received.
- In this busy Christmas Season, with so much to do and all the many family visits, “Do we have time for our neighbor in need of a word from us, from me, or in need of my affection? Do we have time and space for God?”¹

8. Today the “Word becomes Flesh”. To experience the impact of these words read them backwards - “Flesh becomes the Word” - that is to say, we are given a glimpse of what our Heavenly Father intended us to be: our humanity a reflection of his Word, our flesh at home in the Word of God, familiar with it.

9. Pope Benedict XVI reflected once upon the example of the Mother of God’s familiarity with the Word of God and proposed it to us as a way to appropriate those early morning conversations of the Father and the Son.

28. “Here I would like to mention Mary’s familiarity with the word of God. This is clearly evident in the Magnificat. There we see in some sense how she identifies with the word, enters into it; in this marvellous canticle of faith, the Virgin sings the praises of the Lord in his own words: ‘The Magnificat – a portrait, so to speak, of her soul – is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the word of God; the word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the word

¹ Benedict XVI, Homily at Midnight Mass, December 25, 2007.
<https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict->

[xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20071224_christmas.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20071224_christmas.html). Accessed January 3, 2022.

of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate””.²

² *Idem*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (September 30, 2010). <https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict->

[xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html). Accessed January 3, 2022.