

2020 Christmas Day

1. **A saint's body is incorrupt.** Life seems to linger for centuries in a dead person! Planets align after eight hundred years of drifting in space. A story is told in which the past and present and future all come together in a magical harmony which none of us ever experiences in the present! A virgin, without knowing man, conceives a man in her womb. **Unexpected conjunctions of people and things and events pull us out of our experiential complacency and cause us to wonder.** Compared to the intimacy of the Gospel experience last night, today's Gospel is a vertiginous experience, a massively wondrous experience. We move from the intimacy of human life in divine form to the transcendence of divine life in human form. We need the greatest possible dose of dizziness when we come to the mystery of the Word made flesh. **Nothing in our human experience can prepare us for it.**

2. **This is why I love the book of Revelation as a Christmas book,** not because it is fantastical high drama but rather because everything human is stripped away and the reader is given a glimpse of an unprecedented scale of harmony, power and transformation taking over the world and the cosmos. **We are left with an unreal feeling because we have no measure for gauging these events.** The divine tsunami of God's life with its unhindered momentum simply overwhelms our creation to align it with its own life. The whole liturgy today tries to prepare our thoughts, to open them up to these divine dimensions taking place in the historical event of the Incarnation. Many opposites come together that will repeat themselves again in the death and resurrection of the Incarnate Word and in a final conclusion with the book of Revelation. **Christmas is the beginning of the book of Revelation!**

3. **The herald of good tidings breaks into shouts of joy, "Your God is King!"** (Isa 52:7) Since when did God covet the thrones of kings? Poetry gives way to reality, "All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God!" (Psa 97:3) The author of the letter to the Hebrews makes God's revelation personal for us: God has spoken **to us** but his manner of speaking has changed. **Now his Son is his speech in person.** Furthermore, these are the last days; the divine promises will make their power and glory felt. **The radiance of this Son eclipses all other light.** The brilliance of the Son of God will replace the light of creation. We have no measure for this kind of experience. And if we can imagine kings being enthroned with glory and majesty, here again occurs an enthronement that is far above our imagination, for "he takes his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, far above the angels." (Heb 1:3-4) **Our imagination fails to keep up.**

4. St. John summarizes the ineffable: what was forever unknown has become manifest. The Word that was with the Father, hidden like an untraceable star, has become known: "No one has ever seen God, it is the only Son, who is nearest the Father's heart, who has made him known." (Jn 1:18) In so doing he has joined the heavenly and the earthly, the visible and the invisible, man and God, what is mortal with what is immortal, what is of divine nature with what is of human nature, what had no glory with what has eternal glory. This is why I said that compared to the intimacy of the Gospel experience yesterday, today's Gospel is a vertiginous experience.

5. **What does all this mean for us?** When we hear the prophet say, "Break into shouts of joy together!", (Isa 52:9) when we hear the Letter to the Hebrews say, "In these last days he has spoken to us, by his Son" (1:2), or the Gospel say, "to all who accepted him he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12), then this event is not outside our experience. We are not just witnessing a

conjunction of planets happening up in the sky but within our experiences. **Christmas is the womb of the Church's life.** A mother has a deep, precise memory of each conception and birth. The Church wants us to live the memory of this maternal womb which is Christmas.

6. **It is the fragrance of her glory,** the inspiration of her deepest hopes, the blueprint of her action plan for the world. It means we need to take lots of time to ponder this mystery. **And not just ponder it, but learn how to contemplate it.** This is why over the millennia, monks have opted out of the world to be trained by this mystery on how to live in the world. Monastic life is not just rules and regulations and a black and white world of radicality, but a world that seeks to live within this mystery and contemplate it constantly. The discipline that Christmas offers us is a difficult one: **to stand within the conjunction of the human and divine nature permanently,** which is nothing other than the mystery and beauty and joy of the divine communion that has embraced us.

7. **Such is the life of the Eucharist:** to live on the transforming border of the divine and human nature of the Son of God, enclosed by the protective womb of the Virgin Mary. **In her heart, she pondered on the union of all these profound opposites brought about by the life of God, and we continue that reflection.**