

## CHRISTMAS DAY    Midnight Mass

### A) CHRISTMAS CARDS

- One of the tasks that we undertake as we approach Christmas is the sending of Christmas greetings
- nowadays we are able to send ecards and the internet provides us with various other ways of greeting and communicating with family and friends: facetime, skype, zoom and so on
- even so, many people still prefer to write and post the traditional Christmas card
- We love to receive them, and we hope that the ones we send will give other people pleasure too
- There are different kinds of Christmas cards which are still available
- Some make no religious reference at all, and say something like "Season's Greetings"
- Others show a Father Christmas figure riding through the sky bringing presents to lucky children
- Others concentrate on winter scenes, made popular in the Victorian era, especially through the stories of Charles Dickens
- And some, of course, reflect some aspect of the Gospel story of the birth of Jesus

### B) RELIGIOUS CARDS

- it's worth looking closely at some of these religious scenes, because they contain details that don't appear in the Gospels at all
- they will often show the Holy Family in a stable, but the Gospel doesn't mention a stable
- it does say that Jesus was laid in a manger, so we presume it was where animals were penned up

- they will show an ox and an ass, but there is no reference to these animals in the Gospel
- in fact there are some sentences in the Old Testament about these animals recognising their master
- the scene is often set at night-time, but the Gospels don't say at what time of the day or night Jesus was born
- they do tell us that shepherds received the angel's message while they were guarding their flocks by night, and the wise men were guided by a star
- what strikes me most of all though, is how Jesus and Mary and Joseph are depicted looking just like ourselves
- in this part of the world they tend to look like Northern Europeans
- but in Africa they will look like Africans;
- in Asia they will look like Chinese or Japanese;
- Native Americans, Inuits, Australian aborigines will all depict them looking exactly like themselves.
- the point is, of course, that Jesus came to share our life, and to live it out as an ordinary human being, just like ourselves

#### C) WHO IS THIS CHILD?

- All of these crib scenes try to convey something of the wonder of the Christmas story
- On the one hand they want us to know that this child is just like us, one of ourselves, sharing our life, living in our world
- And on the other he is something more; he is in fact God himself
- And so these pictures try to convey the divine, through the presence of angels, through the halo adorning the head of each member of the Holy Family
- And often, especially in the paintings of the great artists of the past, with the scene lit not with torches or starlight, but from a light coming from the Child Himself.

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#### - D) LUKE'S PICTURE

- In his Gospel, St Luke paints a picture in words.
- he puts us in touch with the young virgin with child, Joseph her husband, the surprised shepherds, the jubilant angels announcing the good news.
- We are drawn into a drama that is larger than our own;
- we are invited to share the mood of joy and hope;
- we are asked to take our own place in the dark of the manger and gaze on the gift of God, wrapped in swaddling clothes.
- In Jesus, God himself comes to share in our human life with all its joys but with its sorrows too
- The story of the manger is a story of great love and joy and peace and mercy
- but it is also a story of poverty, hardship and ultimate rejection
- what Jesus experiences as a child will be played out all over again in his adult life
- and in Jesus, God himself comes to walk beside us in our own experience of sorrow, and suffering and weakness and failure
- to help us and guide us

#### E) LUKE'S INVITATION

- Luke's invitation to return to Bethlehem has been extended to all believers down through the centuries, and it is offered to us again tonight/today:
- to come and worship, to see for ourselves the fragility of God, the littleness of the mighty one, the sheer tenderness of a love that is offered to all peoples.
- With the birth of this child a new adventure in faith begins.
- A new approach to God is opened up for us, a new way of relating to each other is asked of us.
- Because this child becomes for all of us the Way, the Truth and the Life.

- That is why we make the journey back to Bethlehem each year:  
to rediscover our true selves in the gift of Jesus.

- For us, it is a journey home.

- As G.K. Chesterton wrote:

**To an open house in the evening,**

**home shall we come,**

**to an older place than Eden,**

**and a taller town than Rome.**

**To the end of the way of the wandering star,**

**to the things that cannot be and that are,**

**to the place where God was homeless**

**and we are all at home.**

(with thanks to Fr Denis McBride Seasons of the Word (1991) p. 39)