

CHRISTMAS

In Jesus, the Word of God became human and lived among us, but this unique privilege gives us a massive responsibility: we are asked to let Jesus be born in our hearts, in our homes and in the people we meet.

We don't "deserve" Christmas. Christmas is God's gift to us. It is a declaration that Jesus came for everyone, regardless of their social status and credibility in the eyes of other people.



The commercial Christmas begins a bit earlier every year. At present, it seems to be somewhere about the middle of October, jostling with Halloween witches and masks. The Church's year is a bit different. Advent is a season of preparation. Christmas begins on the evening of December 24th, and ends with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. One way of keeping Christmas special is by not starting to celebrate it too early. Christmas trees and decorations can look a bit sad if they are hanging around too long, and mince pies can lose their flavour if we start eating them too early!

The Christmas liturgy begins celebrating the birth of Jesus on Christmas Eve. Christmas, like Easter, is one of the Church's feasts when we are invited to begin our celebration when it is dark.

Christmas does not stand alone. After Christmas, the major feast day, and possibly an even older one, is the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th. This Holiday of Obligation, commemorates not just the coming of the wise men with their gifts 'to worship the young child, but also God's appearing (Epiphany means appearing or manifestation or showing) among us as one like ourselves in the flesh and blood of Jesus.

The Christmas season ends with the Baptism of the Lord. This was also a "manifestation" of Christ, not now to a handful of mysterious watchers of the heavens, but at the very beginning of his public life as an adult.



Not a reflection today – just a few **Christmas Crackers**.



A young family brought their new-born baby home from the hospital. Their elder child (aged 3) asked if she could be alone with the baby. The parents were surprised by this request and hesitated a moment. Then they took their new-born baby into their bedroom, left them both there and went out.

But, being intrigued, they listened outside the door. The three-year-old girl gazed into the eyes of her infant sister and earnestly begged, “Tell me about God! I'm beginning to forget.”

“Tell me about God! I'm beginning to forget.” Isn't this also a good description of what we are all about as Catholics? We, who can see beyond the tinsel and the glitter of the commercial Christmas, have got a duty to tell the world about God; it is beginning to forget.

What message about God should we tell at Christmas?



A marvellous story is told about a 4-year-old child (might have been the same little girl a year later!). She woke up one night in her room frightened, convinced that there were all kinds of ghosties and monsters in her room. In terror, she ran to her parents' bedroom. Her mother took her back to her room and after soothing her fears, assured her that things were safe there. “You don't have to be afraid. After I leave you, you won't be alone in the room, God will be there with you.” I know that God will be there,” the child protested, “ but I need someone in the room who has some skin on.”

That is the message tonight. That God who made heaven and earth, the stars and everything in the universe has, indeed, got skin; has taken on our skin, our human flesh. The Word was made flesh. We are celebrating God on the broad of his back as a naked, helpless child in the straw, with an ass & an ox.



The ancient world thought that if God did come into this world, he would come as a king into some great royal palace with all the might and majesty that the world calls greatness.

George Macdonald wrote in a poem called “That Holy Thing”:

They were all looking for a king
To slay their foes and lift them high;
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing,
That made a woman cry.



God entered into an ordinary home & into an ordinary family. Another poet Francis Thompson wrote so beautifully 'Ex Ore Infantum' ('Out of the mouths of Babes'):

Little Jesus, wast thou shy
Once, and just so small as I?
And what did it feel to be
Out of Heaven and just like me?



Three priests at the Christmas crib:
The Jesuit asks: “Has he been enrolled yet in one of our schools?”
The Benedictine asks: “Does the crib face the people?”
The Franciscan asks: “Is the baby wrapped up warmly?”



Scripture uses the expression ‘**The Body of Christ**’, to mean three things equally:

- Jesus, the historical person who walked the earth for 33 years;
- The Eucharist, which is also the physical presence of God on earth;
- The body of believers, which is also a real presence of God.

Hence. to use the phrase, ‘The Body of (Christ’ is to refer, at one and the same tinge, to Jesus, the Eucharist, and to the community of faith.

This is not an exaggeration, nor a metaphor. To see, that the body of believers is the body of Christ is not to say something that Scripture doesn’t say. The reverse is true. Scripture, in particular St Paul, never tells us that the body of believers replaces Christ’s body, nor that it represents Christ's bodes, nor even

that it is Christ's mystical body. It says simply: “We **are** Christ's body.” This must be understood physically.

To say, that the body of believers is the body of Christ is not any more of a metaphor than to say that the Eucharist is the body of Christ. The Eucharist and the body of believers are not **like** the Body of Christ. Each **is** the Body of Christ, Just as Jesus is the Body of Christ.

If we ever understood its real truth we would no longer doubt that the gospel is “good news” and we would sing out joy-filled Christmas songs until our lungs burst. The power that came into our world with Jesus, at the first Christmas, is still with us. It is in us. Like Jesus, we too can freely dispense God's forgiveness, heal each other with God's touch, and reach through death itself to save our loved ones.

Christmas begins the mystery of God's body on earth. Our own bodies are part of that mystery.



A Christmas Carol

The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap,
His hair was like a light.
(O weary, weary were the world,
But here is all aright.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's breast,
His hair was like a Star.
(O stern and cunning are the Kings,
But here the true hearts are.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart
His hair was like a fire.
(O weary, weary is the world,
But here the world's desire.)

The Christ-child stood at Mary's knee,
His hair was like a crown,
And all the flowers looked up at Him,
And all the stars looked down.

GK Chesterton



To get into the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem you have to crouch through a tiny door. The great entrance was blocked up to stop bandits on horseback entering to steal the sacred vessels.

But I think it is also symbolic:

Christmas calls on us to come off our high horses and to bend low.

To discover the child who is God.

To discover also our lost innocence and our dependence on God.

TODAY is born our Saviour, Christ the Lord.



"Today a Saviour has been born to you."



And is it true?
And is it true?
For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings

Around those tissueed fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this simple truth compare -
That God was Man In Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.

John Betjeman.

Merry Christmas!