

Christmas Day

Christmas Day: Mass at Dawn

December 25, 2018

Fr. Max Oliva, S.J.

CHRISTMAS DAY: MASS AT DAWN

Christmas is a celebration of

LIGHT - LOVE - JOY

LIGHT:

In our Opening Prayer, we heard these words – “As we are bathed in the new radiance of the Incarnate Word, the light of faith illumines our minds.”

Radiant Light, the light that attracted the shepherds and led them to the cave and the manger.

A Story of Light: "Of Jacob, an elderly shepherd"

Today is the Festival of the Radiant Star, the Festival of God's Love for us!

I have a story to tell about Jacob, a shepherd wh lived many years ago, and I will tell it in his own words.

I am Jacob; I am an old man now, but at the time of the Holy Night, I was a shepherd, a boy of ten, learning at the side of my father. I was sleeping in the fields next to my father and the sheep when I awoke to a great light all around me. Gold and silver rays came down from heaven and the air sparkled and glistened. I was afraid and hid in the robes of my father. In the light were angels whose faces were light and beautiful, and they told us to follow a star to a stable where a most special baby, a baby called Jesus had been born.

My father took my hand, and we ran all the way home to tell my mother and brothers and sisters so that they could come with us to see the baby.

The star was so bright that we found the stable easily. From the stable door came more light, and as we peered inside, we saw a lovely woman holding a

baby who was surrounded in a light. She smiled at us, and we came closer to see the baby.

As I looked upn Baby Jesus, I thought that my heart would burst open I was so filled with the desire to give this child all that I had, but since I was a simple shepherd boy I had nothing.

That night though, I began to change. I became a different boy. I no longer pulled the sheep's tails as often and I no longer rode on their backs. I quit stealing food from my brothers, and I teased my little sisters less often too. I didn't change all at once, but little by little, and I became happy.

I noticed that my father was changing too. He yelled less at my mother and appreciated her more. Our family gradually became a happy and harmonious place. And in my changing I somehow knew that I had given that baby a gift after all. I had given the gift of my heart! And I had become more pleasing to God.

Every year I remember that Holy Night, the night when the heavens opened up and God's Love was poured forth over us.

And every year, at this Festival of the Radiant Star, that Love is available to us if we open our hearts to receive it and invite it in.

Let us pray.

LOVE:

The most often quoted passage in the New Testament is from the Gospel of John, Chapter 3: 16: It reads: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life."

Christmas is about celebrating the faithful love of God. St. Paul to Titus puts it this way, "the kindness and generous love of God our savior has saved us."

Consider the love of Mary and Joseph for one another and their love for Jesus.

Someone wrote of this season: "We can say that Christmas is a time to ponder the baby in the manger and a time to coincide with the pregnancy of Mary. We are to "birth Christ" as well."

We 'birth' him by our love for God and by our love for one another. Here is a story that describes love well.

A Story of Love: "I Knew Your Would Come," by Elizabeth King English

My husband, Herman, and I locked our general store and dragged ourselves home. It was 11:00 P.M. Christmas Eve of 1949. We were dog-tired. We had sold almost all of our toys, and all the layaways except for one package, had been picked up.

Ususally we kept the store open until everything had been claimed. We wouldn't have woken up happy on Christmas knowing that some child's gift was still on the layaway shelf. But the person who had put a dollar down on that package never returned.

Early Christmas morning we and our twelve-year old son, Tom, opened gifts. But I'll tell you, there was something humdrum about this Christmas. Tom was groing up; I missed his childish exuberance of past years.

As soon as breakfast was over Tom left to visit his friend next door. Herman mumbled, "I'm going back to sleep. There's nothing left to stay up for." So there was alone, feeling let down.

And then it began. A strange, persistent urge. It seemed to be telling me to go back to our store. I looked at the sleet and icy sidewalk outside. *Than's crazy*, I said to myself. I tried dismissing the urge, but it wouldn't leave me alone. In fact, it was getting stronger. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer, and I got dressed.

Outside, the wind cut right through me and the sleet stung my cheeks. I groped my way to the store, slipping and sliding. In front of the store stood two boys, one about nine years old, and the other six. *"What in the world are they doing here?"*, I thought to myself.

"See, I told you she would come!", the older boy said jubilantly. *The younger boy's face was wet with tears, but when he saw me his sobbing stopped. "What are you two doing out here?"*, I scolded them, hurrying them into the store. *"You should be at home on a day like this!"*

Both boys were poorly dressed. They had no hats or gloves and their shoes barely held together. I rubbed their icy hands and got them up close to the heater.

"We've been waiting for you," replied the older boy. "My little brother Jimmy didn't get any Christmas." He touched Jimmy's shoulder. "We want to buy some skates. That's what he wants. We have three dollars", he said, pulling the bills from his pocket.

I looked at the money. I looked at their expectant faces. And then I looked around the store. "I'm sorry," I said, "but we have no..." Then my eye caught sight of the layaway shelf with its lone package. "Wait a minute," I told the boys. I walked over, picked up the package, unwrapped it and, miracle of miracles, there was a pair of skates!

Jimmy reached for them. Lord, let them be his size. And miracle added upon miracle, they were his size.

"The older boy presented the three dollars to me. "No," I told him, "I want you to have these skates, and I want you to use your money to buy some gloves." The boys just blinked at first. Then their eyes became like saucers, and their grins stretched wide when they understood I was giving them the skates for free. What I saw in Jimmy's eyes was a blessing. It was pure joy, and it was beautiful to see. My spirits rose.

We walked out of the store together, and as I locked the door I turned to the older brother and said, "How did you know I would come?"

I wasn't prepared for his reply. His gaze was steady, and he answered me softly. "I asked Jesus to send you."

The tingles in my spine weren't from the cold. God had planned this. As we waved goodbye to one another I turned toward home and a brighter Christmas.

JOY:

Joy permeates the events of this day. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "The Lord proclaims to the ends of the earth: your savior comes!"

The Psalmist exclaims: "The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice!"

We rejoice with Mary and Joseph at the birth of Jesus.

We share the joy of the shepherds as they beheld the baby, in the manger.

We wonder at the joy in Heaven over this most sacred event.

A Story of Joy: "Sharon's Christmas Prayer," by John Shea

She was five years old,, sure of the facts, and recited them with slow solemnity, convinced that every word was revelation. She said:

*There so poor they had only peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to eat
and they were a long way from home without getting lost.*

*The lady rode on a donkey, the man walked,
and the baby was inside the lady.*

*They had to stay in a stable
with an ox and an ass (hee-hee)
but the three Rich Men found them
because a star lited the roof.*

*Shepherds came and you could pet the sheep
but not feed them.*

*Then the baby was borned.
And do you know who he was?
Her quarter eyes inflated to silver dollars.
The baby was God!*

*And she jumped in the air,
whirles round, dove into the sofa,
and buried her heas uner the cushions
which is the only proper response
to the Good News of the Incarnation.*