

IN NOMINE IESU

Before you tonight is brought the deepest mystery of God: that the virgin conceived and gave birth to a son, who is Immanuel, God with us. Amidst all of the holiday festivities and obligations and unplanned events, there is the ever-present reality of that holy day when God became man, born of the virgin womb.

Tonight you ponder the majesty of God and the wonder of God's love for us fallen men. That He would stoop so low as to set aside His rights to being God and assume our flesh that we should be redeemed, bought back from the sin and shame we'd fallen into. Greater love has no man than that he would lay down his life for a friend. How much greater then is God's love in that He laid down His divine rights to be born into our flesh, born in a manger under auspicious circumstances, for the purpose of dying for His enemies?

In the fullness of time...time is not a continuum. Time has been completed. We count the days in successive order on our calendars, but really we're counting down the days. The days are coming to a close. The end is indeed near. Do not be afraid. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.

Unto is born this day a man who is God. The power of the Holy Spirit overshadowed the virgin girl and she conceived and gave birth to a son who is called holy – the Son of God. The angels of God appeared in the sky and to shepherds tending their flock, sing glory to God in the highest and peace to His people on earth. A star appeared in the east, bringing human kings who would worship this Child, this babe, the son of Mary.

Soon every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus, the Christ, the One born of Mary, is Lord. It is from the mouth of this baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, that now coos at his mother's gentle touch, that comes a sword sharper than any double-edged sword. A sword that divides and conquers. A sword that separates you from your sin and guilt and shame. Peace be with you.

You hear a lot the phrase, "that's what Christmas is all about." Sometimes it succeeds a statement about family or love or charity or peace or gentleness of spirit. Sometimes it succeeds the greedy hands of a child, thinking that Christmas is all about the toys under the tree. But Linus had it right. When Charlie Brown shouted in frustration, "Can't anyone tell me what Christmas is all about?" Linus was right there with the Gospel according to St. Luke: "for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

And that is why I am in favor of the commercialization of Christmas. All over the country preachers tonight will be deriding the commercialization of Christmas because it takes away from the holy meaning of Christmas or because people begin think Christmas is only about toys and presents and missal toe. But I, for one, am glad for the commercialization of Christmas. After all, if it weren't for the commercialization of Christmas, I doubt there would be so many of us here tonight.

Even before Thanksgiving you can walk the isles of stores and see on Christmas cards and wrapping paper the Guardian Joseph and His Virgin bride huddled over a manger with the

hands that would be pierced by Roman soldiers reaching upward to embrace those for whom He was born and would die.

Every child, churched or unchurched, who watched *Charlie Brown's Christmas Special*, heard the Word of God and now knows who the ceramic baby lying in a ceramic manger is. When else are you going to be standing in the endlessly long checkout line, fuming under your hat because the idiot at the front of the line is paying with a check, and find yourself quietly singing, "Hail the Incarnate Deity!"

Were it not for the commercialization of Christmas there would be no mysteries priests on Soap Operas and no phrase "Christmas miracle," to remind us of *the* Christmas miracle. Here is the greatest mystery of God, the virgin birth of the God-man, Jesus, and every department store from here to New York to Tokyo to London to Fargo, North Dakota, is playing the carols of Christmas, the songs of heaven, opening the ears of the deaf and unstopping the mouths of the mute and opening the eyes of the blind.

Every single mom estranged from her mother, who stood staring at toys she could not buy her little ones, has heard: Peace on Earth and Good Will Toward Men. Every husband who has cheated on his wife, every child who has rebelled against his parents, every mother who has abandoned or abused her children, everyone of you who has had less than desirable thoughts and motives, everyone who has ever sinned, which is everyone, has heard: "Why lies He in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding? Good Christian, fear; for sinners here the silent Word is pleading. Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, the Cross be borne for me, for you: Hail, Hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary."

If the Church has given the world a Christmas present by giving to it a day on which to be nostalgic, drinking eggnog and giving gifts to one another, and eating good food and laughing and making merry, then the world has given to the Church a Christmas present in giving to her a time in which she might unabashedly proclaim the glories and wonder of God to people everywhere. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

I propose then, that we should not deride the commercialization of Christmas, God is getting the Word out. Perhaps we should be trying to figure out how to commercialize the other Festival Days of the Church. But none of them quite lend themselves to nostalgia as Christmas does. It is hard to be cute about Good Friday. But still, during these two months of Christmas cheer and holiday spirit, God is once again, year after year, placing His angelic host in the skies over every city, every town, every house, and on every television to proclaim the glories and wonders of His love in the Baby born of Mary.

So perhaps we can start a new tradition. When you feel the weight of sin bear down upon you, when you feel the guilt of impure thoughts or the shame of wanting revenge, when you are tempted to indulge the flesh and enjoy the tantalizing pleasures of sin, sing a Christmas carol. Not to make yourself feel better, but to remind you that unto you is born a Savior. One who is able to make you whole and righteous, assuming your flesh so that you would be saved from sin and shame. And if it makes you feel better, then be glad for it. All hail the Incarnate Deity!

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠