

## Jesus' Birth – The Bigger Picture

December 24, 2020, The Nativity of The Lord

Gospel of Luke 2:1-16

Fr. John

One of the most striking versions of the Christmas story for me has always been Charles Dickens', *A Christmas Carol*. Ironically, if you have read the book or seen one of the several movie adaptations of it, you will note that there is no mention of Jesus' birth in a stable in Bethlehem and all the familiar surroundings and images that go with that. Rather, what we get is a story of the inner transformation of a man called Ebenezer Scrooge.

The reason I like the story so much is that it ultimately takes me out of the danger of reducing Christmas to the realm of nostalgia and sloppy sentimentality and points me to a clearer understanding of what God is trying to convey to us as we observe this solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord.

We often make the mistake of thinking that the story has to be ABOUT Jesus. While what our attention should be drawn to is what Jesus is ABOUT.

If it's only a story about Jesus, we can easily relegate ourselves to the role of spectators and cheer him on from the sidelines. We need not involve ourselves more than that. BUT, if we dare to enter the story to probe what Jesus is about, [and therefore what God is about] - that will take us to the dangerous threshold of personal self examination and ultimate action that can be life-changing.

In Dicken's story, Scrooge is literally given a wake-up call by three spirits who speak to him about his past, present, and future. He is shaken by what he sees, given the trajectory of where his life is going. He has lived his life within the narrow confines of greed and self interest. He has severed any meaningful relationships even within his own family and has hardened his heart to the needs of others.

So this takes us back to the question - what was Jesus about [and therefore what is God about?]. Well it was about trying to get us to see life differently. Dickens uses the character of Scrooge as a case in point. His transformation once he is sensitized to the realities around him becomes the central theme of the story. And that's where we come to see what Jesus is about and what our lives are ultimately about.

We refer the nativity of Jesus as the Incarnation - God entering fully into the flesh and blood of our humanity in the person of Jesus. And we think that it was a nice thing for God to do and we leave it at that - simply a nice gesture to all of us. But how does that affect me and how is that going to really change my life?

Well, the Incarnation was much more than merely a nice gesture - it was the manner in which God exhibited His love through the medium of human flesh and how this could be the manner in which we realize our own full potential as human beings.

Perhaps this year, 2020, has presented many opportunities to do just that. As Scrooge was awoken to see his world differently so hopefully we have as well in view of the pandemic that has affected so much in our lives. Sometimes rude awakenings have forced us to see what has been lacking in the way that we operate as a society. We

have come to see more clearly how we have blinded ourselves to the elderly, the needy and the marginalized.

So often I hear others and even myself saying: 'I hope we can soon get back to normal again.' It would be a pity if after all this, that we simply went back to the way we were and learned nothing and did nothing. Scrooge could have dismissed the three spirits as a bad dream and gone back to his old miserly ways the next morning.

Tonight however we celebrate the fact that God didn't just offer us a nice gesture. He actually rolled up his sleeves and began the work of helping us to become fully human - whole and holy. And the name of that project is Jesus the Christ who is the human face of the Creator of the entire universe. And we are the benefactors of that gift - and not just passive benefactors but active ones.

Many have labelled this Christmas as one like no other in our lifetime. Yes, we've had to curtail most of our traditional events [school and community concerts, family gatherings, travel, and even our church liturgies]. But on the other hand, it will have hopefully changed us enough to engage ourselves in what Jesus was about and therefore what we need to be about. Creating a world that is more just, compassionate, generous and self-giving. That's the way we keep Christ in Christmas - by doing what he came into the world to do.

So tonight and tomorrow as we observe and celebrate the birth of Jesus may it also birth in us a deeper and even more profound appreciation of the unconditional love that God has for us. And as Tiny Tim says at the end of Dickens' story; 'God bless us, every one.'