

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, those great glad tidings tell, Oh, come to us, abide with us. O Lord, Emmanuel. Amen.



It's that time of year again. And the most important question is: what do you want for Christmas? At this time of year I am reminded of that song with the words, “All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth.” Talk about not setting the bar too high! All you want are two front teeth? Really? I can think of a lot better things than two front teeth.

For our purposes tonight, perhaps a better question would be: what are your hopes and dreams for Christmas?

People have lots of hopes and dreams at Christmas. Some hope that if they can get the whole family together in one place and get through Christmas without a family argument. Then, it will be a perfect Christmas! For others it's if they get a certain gift, a job, a raise, or promotion...

Then it will be a perfect Christmas. Still others hope that a certain family member would stop drinking, or if that certain couple in our family would just get together again. Then it would be a perfect Christmas. Or, if only that loved one would just get out of the hospital or nursing home it would be a perfect Christmas.

We often think that if we can just get this or that or the other thing, then everything will be perfect, and the miracle of Christmas will be complete. But then the reality sets in and we know that these things are not going to happen.

Yes, Christmas is a time of hopes and dreams. And yet, the actual fulfillment of the hopes and dreams of Christmas goes way beyond anything that we could ever possibly hope for or dream of. Who would have ever hoped for or dreamt of a wonderful counselor, an everlasting Father, a prince of peace? Isaiah did. Who would have ever hoped or dreamt of a true comforter and advocate, one who would stand with us through the good and bad and the ugly of life and never abandon us? St. John the Evangelist did. Who would have ever hoped for a true savior and redeemer, who would come to both confront our sin and to save us from the threatening danger of our sins by his forgiveness, mercy and grace? You see, all of God's people have hoped for this ever since that day long ago when Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden.

These hopes and dreams are not products of our imaginations. These hope and dreams lead us to the ultimate truth in the world. And we believe that the ultimate truth is a word. And we

believe, teach and confess that this word came down from heaven and was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary for us and for our salvation.

There was a group of very creative S.C.S. students developing their modern version of the traditional Christmas pageant. As the people came into the church for the performance, they saw a stable background and some bales of hay. They soon heard some moaning and groaning behind the bales of hay. Mary was in labor after all, and there were the sound effects. And Joseph was pacing back and forth in front of the hay bales. He was, of course, the anxious father. And soon the moaning and groaning stopped and then there was a glorious and beautiful cry of a newborn baby piercing the air. Finally, a doctor came out from behind the hay bales, took off his surgical mask and said “Congratulations Joseph, it’s a God.”

How’s that for a new way of announcing the Christmas event? Congratulations, it’s a God!”

It is so very difficult finding words and images to communicate the mystery, miracle and wonder of Christmas. It is very difficult finding words and images to describe an event that has both a cosmic and personable dimension. And yet, the Holy Scriptures in their profound simplicity simply say, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that all those who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life.” Or in the words of the Eucharistic preface Christmas in Christ: we “see the God made visible, so that we can be drawn to love the God whom we cannot see.”

My brothers and sisters in Christ, it is my hope and prayer for you that the gift of Christmas would fall upon you like the first heavy snow fall of winter. What does it look like before the first snow fall—the landscape is dark and, dreary, scarred and pot-holed. Then that first heavy snow comes and covers everything. Everything thing looks new, beautiful and perfect. That is, until you have to start shoveling it! But you get my point. In the same way, God comes to us in Christ and he covers over all our sin and brokenness, all our hurts and scars, our ugliness with the beauty of his forgiveness, mercy and grace.

“All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth.” I guess if you need two front teeth—then two front teeth are the best Christmas gift of all. Through the Christ Child and his gift of forgiveness; God offers us an incredible gift. He offers us a fresh start, a new beginning, a whole new life. And this is of course the greatest blessing of the Bethlehem birth. [And this is of course the greatest Christmas gift of all.]

For you see when we search for God, we call it religion. When God searches for us, we call it Christmas! And so, I say unto you, may yours be a most blessed Christmas! AMEN.

+Christo Gloria in Ecclesia +

Illustration: Madonna and Child, Duccio, 1255-1218 A.D.