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On this, the Sunday after Christmas, and the seventh day of Christmas, when the rush of the Christmas season is already over, the radio has stopped playing Christmas music, and most of the decorations are already down, the Church invites us to hear again the Christmas story. Of this great mystery of the Incarnation and Nativity, Blessed John Keble writes, *We believe that...the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, having been conceived by the Holy Ghost and made man, was born at Bethlehem of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that on this day God was manifested to men and angels in the flesh, so declaring and making known the Eternal Father, in whose bosom He is and whom no man hath seen at any time. We believe that He who was from the beginning, begotten from everlasting of the Father, condescended early that morning to have a beginning and a birth of His own; that He who is God of God vouchsafed to be man born of woman; that He who is called Light of Light prepared for Himself, as it were, a visible tabernacle, and undefiled human soul and body, wherein to dwell visibly for ever and ever.*

We hear in the Scriptures, *when all things were in quiet silence and night was in the midst of her swift course, thine almighty Word, O Lord, leaped down from heaven out of thy royal throne.* And aside from the angels appearing to shepherds in the neighboring fields, there was no fanfare. Aside from a solitary star guiding a few wisemen to the Christ Child, there were no awe-inspiring signs at all in the heavens or in the earth either. For such a momentous event, one would have expected signs akin to what is found in the Psalms and Prophets, when they ask the Lord to, *bow the heavens and come down...touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.* Keble writes, *It would never have come into any of our minds to think of any thing so quiet, so poor, mean and ordinary in outward appearance, as the nativity of the Child Jesus at Bethlehem. Never, I suppose, since the world began, was there such a moment as that to show how unlike God's thoughts are to our thoughts, and God's ways to our ways except...that awful, perhaps more surprising moment...in which the God of Heaven and earth, bowed His head on the Cross and gave up the ghost.* Jesus experienced an ordinary birth, and the death of any other ordinary criminal sentenced to crucifixion.

But this ordinariness in birth and in death was not by itself enough for Jesus. We confess and believe that He, being Divine, took our ordinary human nature upon Himself. He is fully Divine, and fully ordinary human, fully God and fully man. It is only through this taking on of our ordinary life, even in birth and in death, that

Jesus accomplishes the extraordinariness of our salvation. As the Collect for the twelve days of Christmas teaches, that *Almighty God [has] given us thy only begotten Son to take our nature upon him*, and points in a remarkable way to *our being regenerate, and made His children by adoption and grace*, to our baptisms. For as the Baptism service teaches, *we are regenerate and born anew of water and of the Holy Ghost*, and then as the catechism teaches, *we are made children of God*. The Epistle for this morning expands upon this saying, *God sent forth His Son...that we might receive the adoption of Sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ*.

As Jesus at His Nativity shows Himself in our human nature, so we at our baptisms, St. Peter tells us, are made partakers of His Divine nature. As He then became a child of Adam, so we are now made Children of God, so great is the change that Baptism makes. And yet, if we stand back and judge by sight and not by faith, it all seems so ordinary that it is hard to imagine there was any change at all. We might have liked to have seen a dove appearing and descending, rays of light, or halos, or the newly baptized glowing! And yet, who would believe that a little water and a few words spoken by a Christian minister would make so much difference in a little child, if it were not that the Bible and the Church teaches it? We might also wonder what difference it all makes, when we stand back and observe the lives of so many who profess to be baptized, and yet live in such an unchristian way. Why bother with Baptism at all if some baptized Christians resemble more of Herod than of Christ? But we have the very words of Jesus to remind us of the great importance of something so ordinary, *verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God*.

Our Baptisms and the Birth of Jesus Christ have much in common, simply because it is so unlike what we might have expected. It reminds us that something so great and wonderful as Salvation comes from something so ordinary as pouring water in the Name of the Trinity, just as our redemption, and that of the whole world, came down from heaven, and depended on a small child wrapped in swaddling clothes, born in an inn stable and laid in an ordinary manger. Among the many lessons that our Lord's Nativity teaches us, one of the greatest is not to despise what the Prophet Zechariah calls *the day of small things*. Jesus calls us to pay attention to the ordinary, even in those matters we might consider trifling, not knowing of how much consequence they may prove to the greatest matter of all.

Likewise, we must not make light of the little ordinary beginnings and trifling liberties which we permit ourselves to take with God's commandments.

We pray today that our eyes may be opened to understand, in some measure, God's gracious and ordinary beginnings with ourselves. As He, our Lord and Savior Himself, from the very moment of His birth on Christmas Day never ceased loving us and preparing all good things for us, so never let us turn away our thoughts from His unspeakable love. It is such love as we never can fathom, never can truly understand, but we will understand more and more, as we turn our minds toward it earnestly. To watch and study Christ in His cradle is the very mystery of humility and, if of humility, then of love, peace, and joy. It is the very preparation, the beginning of eternal happiness; *for in knowledge of Him standeth our eternal life*, and such knowledge must begin from His lowliness. We must remember that Jesus Himself is that little Child, like whom we must especially become, if we would be ever really fit for the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.