

Thursday, Christmas Day, December 25, 2025

Merry Christmas. The Christmas story, which we know very well - the Annunciation of the good news to Mary that she would become the mother of God; the journey to Bethlehem; the birth of Jesus; Jesus being laid in a manger. We know the story of the angel, the shepherds, the star, and the Magi.

The whole story of Christmas is situated in a much broader story, a greater context and it is important for us to know the Christmas story, of course, but it's also important for us to know the greater context in which these events of our salvation unfolded. And it began, not with the Annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel speaking to Mary, it began really with the beginning, the creation of time, the creation of the world, and all that exists in it. And it extends of course, to us today and beyond us, into tomorrow. When I teach, I like to use a timeline. Some of our high school youth group students here know that I have a timeline - it's on the whiteboard in the library. So, if you'll bear with me, like to make sort of an illustration of a timeline. I don't have a big chalk board here to use but just imagine the timeline sort of extending from this side to that side.

So, it begins, as I said, with the creation of time itself. Before the creation of time, there was only God and God created time, and then He created the world in time. The incredible jewel of creation of His was mankind. He delighted in them – man and woman, male and female – He created them. He saw what He made, He saw that it was very good. But not long after that, sin entered the picture through disobedience. And so, there was a rupture of that initial friendship that God enjoyed with mankind and mankind enjoyed with God. There was a rupture in that relationship through sin. And

then ever since that time, God began to unveil, to reveal His plan for reconciling mankind to Him.

So, there was a flood, and then there were covenants. There was a covenant with Noah. And there was a covenant with Abraham. God promised to Abraham that He would make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, or the sand on the shore of the sea. Sometime after that, the chosen people were taken into slavery in Egypt. We know that whole story. Years, and years, and years, and years, they toiled in slavery, and at one point God raised up Moses to be the one to deliver the people of God from that slavery. You know the story of how Moses led the people through the Red Sea onto dry ground. The water of the sea parted. And they wandered through desert, but they came to the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey. Moses didn't get to enter. He saw it from a distance, but he didn't get to enter it.

Then God raised up judges to govern the people, and ultimately God raised up kings. He established a kingdom. We know the story of Saul and David and Solomon, and so many other kings that followed, mostly bad, some good. And this whole series of kings. And then there came times of exile. There was a Syrian exile, and people were driven from the land. There was a Babylonian exile. This was around 586, 587 BC. And that was somewhere around 50 years that they were exiled in Babylon. And during that time, God raised up prophets who continued to speak to God's people of this developing plan of God to reconcile us to Him. And of course, eventually comes the birth of Christ, and in the life and ministry, the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ we have the fulfillment of all of this that God has been revealing from the beginning - from creation, from the fall, and all the covenants, and the judges, the kings, the prophets, all of that - is a preparation for the entry of Jesus Christ

onto the scene, into the scene, unto the scene - however you want to put it. The Savior! God is preparing for all this, and then Jesus arrives on this scene. And that is this narrow little window where we have the story, the Annunciation, the birth. And then, of course, we know there was the flight to Egypt because Joseph and Mary, and the child Jesus, had to escape the wrath of King Herod. We know that Joseph and Mary and Jesus settled in Nazareth. Jesus grew up there. You know one story of his childhood anyway, where they went to Jerusalem to fulfill the precepts of the law for the feast. And Joseph and Mary started back home, and they realized after a little while that Jesus was not with them. So, they went back to Jerusalem. This is when Jesus was twelve years old. Then comes a period of silence. We don't know anything about the life of Jesus in the family from the time He was twelve to the time He was baptized.

And then He was sent out into the desert for forty days and began His public ministry, teaching, and working miracles, announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God. And of course, we know of His passion, death and resurrection. The source of our life, the source of our hope. After His Resurrection, He appeared for forty days to many, many, many people. They were witnesses of the truth that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And then after forty days, He ascended into heaven, about ten days later, He sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost to fill the hearts of those who had gathered in that upper room and were so anxiously awaiting that promise made for the Spirit.

And that, of course, is the birth of the Church. At that point we enter into the era of the Church, the early Church, the apostolic age, the Church fathers, and so forth in so long, long succession of popes, bishops and the faithful, celebrating the sacraments, bringing

the grace of God into the lives of real people, transforming them, giving them healing and hope and light. And that brings us to today.

I remember, as a child, one of my favorite parts of Christmas gatherings and other family gatherings we had was my dad would come out with a projector. We actually had a reel-to-reel projector. We eventually got a camcorder. I know some of you kids don't know what a camcorder is. We have these family videos and family movies. And there's no sound. So, my dad would tell us what was going on and some of them were so old I didn't know who the people were. You know, I was the youngest, but my dad, you know, got married in 1958. So, there were a lot of people, you know, that I didn't know about. And then, of course, I went to the, into the scene came my older brothers and sisters, so I saw, you know, and as a little baby, some kids running around, and "Ah, I can connect with that." It was fun to watch that. But then there was a point where I was in the video too. As a little baby, a toddler or a young child. And you know, it wasn't this big ego trip. Like I needed to see myself in, you know, not on the screen or something, but it was important to me. It was valuable to me to see that I was in the story. I knew, of course, obviously I was part of this family. But to see that I fit into that whole narrative. That was important.

I say that because that's how we ought to look at this timeline from creation all the way to today and beyond. It's not just something that we observe unfolding in real time or think back on all these events. You know, we can memorize the series of events or study, you know, books of the Law or prophets. It's not just for us to see, but we realize that it's our story, too. How many here are baptized? Just about everyone, I think. You are baptized into the mystery of Jesus Christ and His suffering death and resurrection. So, this whole story of Salvation History becomes yours. In a certain way, from the

beginning of your existence, yes, all of creation is part of the story, because God wants to bring all of creation back into friendship with Him so to speak. He wants to heal the wounds of sin and division. But in a very particular way, especially in privileged way, Baptism brings us into this reality. That's where we come onto the 'screen' of this story. But not just Baptism.

You noticed that as we're following this story, the appearance of the Christ right here in the middle. Right in front of the altar. We heard in the Gospel: "*That the word became flesh.*" The eternal word of God, spoken from before time, took on our flesh, our creation. Christmas. The word means "Christ's Mass". It's connected to the Mass. The Sacrament of the body and the blood of Christ.

In the Byzantine Catholic tradition, they have an icon where it shows an altar, and the paten is the vessel onto which the bread is placed for Consecration, but instead of bread, this icon shows the baby Jesus. So, picture the baby Jesus right here. But then also, when you when you go to the manger and you ponder the birth of Jesus - it's the same, the same Word made flesh. When you go there, think of the altar. Think of the bread of life given to us.

And after our baptism, of course, we have in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, renewing that grace of Baptism, that we also have this tremendous gift of Jesus Christ, His body and blood in the Eucharist, to strengthen us and heal and draw us deeper and deeper into the heart of God. That's God's intention in this whole story to take your heart into His. And for those two hearts to become one.

That's the gift of Christmas. He's come. All this Advent we say, "Come Lord Jesus. Come Lord Jesus. Come Lord Jesus, we are opening our hearts", and now we recognize He is here. God with us. God with us at the altar. God giving Himself for us. To us. Christmas

is the time we bring out our Nativity scenes. We just ponder this tremendous, wondrous mystery.

Christmas is a wonderful time for us also to ask God for the grace to see in the manger the Bread of Life. And to see on the altar the nourishment we desperately need to sustain us, to raise us up over all the things that weigh us down. The grief and the sadness of life, the struggles, the confusion, the disappointments, the discouragements, all these things. Jesus is the Light who lifts us up. And today, this morning, in this celebration, we can once again open our hearts to receive the greatest gift of Christmas: the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.