



CHRISTMAS 2023
A MESSAGE FROM THE
PRIMATE OF THE TRADITIONAL ANGLICAN CHURCH

Christmas! The joyous Day and Season when we celebrate the birth of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. The world around us for just a brief time pauses; gifts are exchanged, love is renewed, and family and friends gather once more.

Yet the Gospel message for Christmas would have us look beyond the merely human, beyond the tinsel and lights, the carols and Christmas cheer, to ask ourselves, "Who is this babe lying in a manger?" The answer every true believer would offer in response is both profoundly simple and yet profoundly deep: "He is the Incarnate God – the Word made flesh, the Saviour of the world."

Christmas is not only about the birth of the Christ Child at Bethlehem, though it is certainly the focus of our celebrations. Christmas, the Nativity of the Lord, is the affirmation, the revelation, that Jesus born of Mary is the Son of God, He who came and lived among us, God in man.

The humble birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is the perfect revelation of God to the reality that on that holy night so many centuries ago God Himself was born into the world He created. And that understanding, that truth, is something which so many in our modern world just cannot get, let alone accept. Consequently, for many people the meaning of Christmas has been lost or sadly replaced by a worldly version which ultimately disappoints and even fails.

None of us could ever fathom what it means for God to be born in a manger. How do we explain Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, stooping to become a tiny infant? It was and is, of course, the greatest act of humility the world has ever known or will ever know.

Our minds cannot begin to understand let alone grasp what was involved in God becoming man. We will never comprehend why He who was infinitely rich would choose to become poor. Why He would assume a human nature and enter into a world He knew would ultimately reject Him and kill Him.

Nor can we explain why God would enter the world He created not as a king, or a president, or a superman; but as a frail, new born babe in an obscure village in a faraway land. Yet He did. Without forsaking His divine nature or diminishing His Godhead, He was born into our world and lived and died and rose again, one like us in all things but sin.

People ask, did He know pain; did He know loss of loved ones, the betrayal of friends? To which we can answer in all truth, Yes, He did. He was fully human, with all the needs, emotions and frailty that are common to every man, woman and child. Yet He was also fully God - all wise, all powerful, all knowing, all loving. Jesus, the Word made flesh, the divine Son of God, voluntarily suspended the full application of His divine attributes and was born of a human mother, the Virgin Mary. Through His birth, life, ministry, passion and death, He remained (and continues to remain) fully God and fully human.

For over 2,000 years, debates have raged about who Jesus really is, what He stood for, what His life and death were really about. Cults and skeptics have offered various explanations. Some say He is one of many gods, a created being, a high angel, a good teacher, a prophet, a social activist, a philosopher. Throughout the many debates though is a common thread, they make Jesus less than God, and even sometimes less than human. But Scripture and human history reveal the truth.

St. John's Gospel, which we read every Christmas Day, begins with a clear statement that Jesus is God:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made". *John 1:1-3.*

Who is "the Word" spoken of in these verses? Verse 14 removes any doubt:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

Both the biblical and non-biblical historical evidence is overwhelming that this Child in the manger was and is the incarnation of God. In Jesus we have the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies of the coming Messiah, both in the Scriptural revelation of the Hebrew Testament and in the prophecies of ancient cultures, as evidenced by historical record and most poignantly, the journey of the Magi to Bethlehem.

Jesus began His earthly ministry with a simple act, He created wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee; yet only God can create something from nothing. He healed people who were hopelessly ill. He gave to those who were blind the gift of sight. He opened ears that had never heard. He restored broken and withered limbs. He created fish and bread to feed thousands who were hungry for what He alone could give them. He raised the dead by simply commanding them to rise and come forth. He forgave the woman caught in adultery, and promised the repentant thief Paradise. He has promised you and me His unconditional love and everlasting life.

Who was this Child? He is God Incarnate. The evidence is clear for all who would seek and find Him. The Scriptures are clear, the human record is clear, though so many in our world today seem content to keep Him at a distance -- a seasonal decoration, the babe in a manger once a year.

But for us, as we make our Christmas devotions and receive Him in the Blessed Sacrament on Christmas Day, we are uniting ourselves to the Word who came down from heaven and dwelt among us. For Christmas is not just an historical event or a pretty picture found in cards and carols. Christmas is the celebration of the union of God with man for the redemption of the world. And therein is the truth of this holy Day – that the eternal Word of God, born in a manger, born in time yet present from all eternity, is born again and lives on in every soul that receives Him as Lord and Saviour.

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth."

A very joyous and blessed Christmas to you all!

*The Most Reverend Shane B. Janzen
Primate of the Traditional Anglican Church*