

Homily on the Solemnity of Nativity of the Lord
St. John Paul II Parish, Cedar Springs, Michigan
Mary Queen of Apostles Parish, Sand Lake, Michigan
Father Lam T. Le, Pastor
December 25, 2018

“While they were there [Bethlehem], the time came for her to have her child” (Lk 2:4)

Have you noticed in our Christmas hymns the word “Bethlehem” often comes up? To make note of a few: “In Bethlehem in Judah this blessed babe was born/and laid in a manger upon this blessed morn.” “Come to Bethlehem and see/ Him whose birth the angels sing.” “O Come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant/ O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.” Finally, there is an entire song starting with the name of the town:

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

Christmas hymns mention “Bethlehem” because the Gospels, for example the Gospel of Luke says this about the city of the Birth of the Lord: “Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son” (Lk 2:4). Bethlehem, what is so significant about the fact that Christ was born in it?

First it has something to do with the fulfillment of the expectation of the people of God which is captured well by the thoughts of the prophet Micah:

You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times. Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne, and the rest of his kindred shall return to the children of Israel. He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD, his God; and they shall remain, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace (Mi 5:1-4).

The prophet Micah shares with Isaiah the expectation that salvation will come through a Messiah, an anointed ruler. This Messiah is a king in the line of David. Bethlehem is the home of the Davidic line. The birth of Jesus took place in this city to fulfill this expectation.

There is another significance of the Birth of the Lord in Bethlehem, and all of us gathered here must take note. In fact, Pope John Paul II in his last homily of the Christmas Mass in 2004, the Year of the Eucharist, comments on the significance of the city where the Savior of the World was born:

Bethlehem! The city where Jesus was born in fulfillment of the Scriptures, in Hebrew means “house of bread.” It was there that the Messiah was to be born, the One who would say of himself: “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:35, 48). In Bethlehem was born the One who, under the sign of broken bread, would leave us the memorial of his Pasch. On this Holy Night, adoration of the Child Jesus becomes *Eucharistic adoration*.

Thus, the Son of God chose to be born in Bethlehem so as to invite all of us gathered here tonight to be faithful to the Eucharistic celebration, especially on Sunday, as Pope Benedict in his 2005 Christmas homily revisited this theme of his predecessor:

When we celebrate the Eucharist we find ourselves in Bethlehem, in the "house of bread". Christ gives himself to us and, in doing so, gives us his peace. He gives it to us so that we can carry the light of peace within and give it to others. He gives it to us so that we can become peacemakers and builders of peace in the world. And so we pray: Lord, fulfil your promise! Where there is conflict, give birth to peace! Where there is hatred, make love spring up! Where darkness prevails, let light shine! Make us heralds of your peace! Amen.

We then return to that verse of song which begins with the name of city of Christ's birth: ". . . The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight" Yes, the hopes of humanity found their fulfillment in Christ and the fears of the world found peace in the Lord on the that Holy Night of Christ's Birth, but now continues in the "house of bread," the Bethlehem of the Church, the Holy Eucharist.

Let us come to Bethlehem of the Church every Sunday to follow the example of the angels on the night of Christ's birth. Come to be nourished! Come to adore for the same Christ born of the Blessed Virgin Mary truly is present at the altar of the Church. The beautiful Eucharistic hymn of the Church indicates: "Ave, verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine. . ." That Christ Child Born of the Blessed Virgin Mary is now being given to us at the Bethlehem of the Church, the Holy Eucharist. Amen.

Scriptural Readings:

Vigil Mass: Reading 1 IS 62:1-5; Responsorial Psalm PS 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29; Reading 2 ACTS 13:16-17, 22-25; Alleluia "Tomorrow the wickedness of the earth will be destroyed: the Savior of the world will reign over us"; Gospel MT 1:1-25

Mass During the Night: Reading 1 IS 9:1-6; Responsorial Psalm PS 96: 1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13.; Reading 2 TI 2:11-14; Alleluia LK 2:10-11; Gospel LK 2:1-14

Mass at Dawn: Reading 1IS 62:11-12; Responsorial Psalm PS 97:1, 6, 11-12; Reading 2 TI 3:4-7 Alleluia LK 2:14; Gospel LK 2:15-20

Mass During the Day: Reading 1IS 52:7-10; Responsorial Psalm PS 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6. Reading 2 HEB 1:1-6; Alleluia "A holy day has dawned upon us. Come, you nations, and adore the Lord. For today a great light has come upon the earth"; Gospel JN 1:1-18
