

ChristMass during the Day + Hebrews 1:1-6 + John 1:1-18 (sf) + 2024

If you are following along in your missalette, you will notice that there are actually 4 different Masses covering Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Each of them offers a different view of the first Christmas: St. Joseph's perspective in St. Matthew's Gospel, Mary's perspective in 2 readings from Luke's Gospel, and today's Gospel from St. John. Now our Gospel today is very different than the other readings from Matthew and Luke. There is no holy spouses, no stable, no shepherds, and no angels. Instead, we have perhaps one of the most beautiful passages of all Scripture—a hymn, or perhaps a poem on which one could spend a lifetime pondering. Echoing the opening of the book of Genesis, we hear:

*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.*

In the beginning, God was. There was nothing else but God. And He was perfectly perfect unto Himself. Self-sufficient, He needed nothing. And yet out of His superabundant goodness, He decided to create. God decided to give of Himself. Put another way, God *loved* creation into being. The book of Genesis tells us that God “spoke”, and the world was made. All that is, came to be through God's “Word”. God's Word, then, completed the very first act of love. Life, spoken by the Word, is the perfect manifestation of God's love.

*What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.*

In the book of Genesis and all through the OT, we also hear how evil—how darkness entered the world. People's hearts were darkened to the point where they could barely see the light. The light was still shining, but the darkness threatened to overcome the light.

*...the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.
He came to what was his own,
but his own people did not accept him.*

God loved the world so much that He sent the Word, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to be born to a Virgin in a cave in Bethlehem. It sounds almost too amazing, too good to be true. So many did not believe in Him. From the moment of His birth, there was no room for Him: no room in the inn, no room in man's hearts. But some did believe: a faithful remnant:

*But to those who did accept him
he gave power to become children of God,
to those who believe in his name...*

In spite of the darkness of sin, persecution, popular disbelief, and even their own doubts, they held on to the faith. And they passed it on to their children, and their children did the same. And now it has come to us. We have the power of the children of God, a grace given to us in Baptism. What will we do with it?

*And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth.*

Some of you may be chronologically-gifted enough to remember the old "Latin Mass." At the very end of the old Mass, the priest would read (in Latin) what was called the "Last Gospel": the prologue of St. John's Gospel, which we are meditating upon. Now, the addition of another Gospel reading at the very end of old Mass might seem a bit odd. But there was a good reason for concluding the Mass in this way. And that is, it reminded the faithful that at every Mass, we are not just witnesses, but participants in the most amazing, most important event in human history: *the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us!* At every Mass, we can truly proclaim: *we saw his glory, the glory of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.* Sure, the communion host may not look like all that much to the untrained eye. But to the eyes of faith, it is "everything." It is the very glory of God, veiled under a Sacramental sign, given to us as our spiritual food.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a poor, unknown child in a cave in Bethlehem may not have looked like much. But to the eyes of Mary and Joseph, and a few shepherds—that is, the eyes of faith, this child was everything. They *saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only son.* We see it too: *behold the Lamb of God! Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world!*

Sadly, we know that this child will grow up, be disbelieved and rejected and killed. He came to give His life in atonement for our sins. He knew what was coming, and yet He chose to become one of us anyway, even unto death on the Cross. But as our 2nd reading from the Letter to the Hebrews proclaims: *when [Jesus] had accomplished purification from sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.* In a few moments, He will be Sacramentally present on our altar, and *we will see His glory.* How can we ever respond? As children of God, let us sing with all of our hearts the song our children sang for worship Wednesday today: *Glory be to you alone, King who reigns on a manger throne! My life, my praise, everything I own, to Jesus who reigns on a manger throne!*