

No ear may hear his coming; But in this world of sin,
Where meek hearts will receive him, still The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

While the quality of my giving may certainly be questioned; the quality of God's may not!

From God who knows our hearts completely and intimately "The wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts The blessings of his heaven".

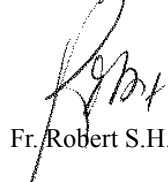
The gift—Jesus—is perfectly tailored to the recipient by the One who does understand the recipient perfectly.

We hear the reminder and the encouragement that "Where meek hearts will receive him, still The dear Christ enters in."

In the final verse I hear what might be echoes of the evangelical narratives of the casting out of spirits or perhaps of the exorcisms of the Baptismal Service as we sing, "O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in; Be born in us to-day."

As we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ; as we grow in our trust in God; and as we live in peace, joy, and hope, may your life be filled with "the wondrous gift"!

Sincerely in Christ,



Fr. Robert S.H. Mansfield, SSC



THE TRADITIONAL ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
A Missionary District of the Anglican Catholic Church

The Very Rev. Robert S.H. Mansfield, SSC
Vicar General

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Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

St. Luke 2:15

Dear All:

As we celebrate Advent and prepare for Christmas, please accept our—Joyce's and mine—greetings, best wishes, and the assurance of our prayers for you and your people.

There is a little book to which I have returned each year about this time. It is ***Christmas: Birth of our Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ & His Private Life*** by Archbishop Joseph Raya, late of Madonna House, Combermere, ON.

Archbishop Joseph was a wonderfully interesting person who radiated the love of God—and here I think of that verse in Romans 5 from which we drew the Synod motto this year: "because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." The Archbishop was a wonderful incarnation of that.

We had the pleasure of meeting and having dinner with him something over 20 years ago after he had "retired" to Combermere.

There are a few lines from that book that I should like to share with you.

"Here we see that in His person, Jesus Christ bridges the abyss that separates the infinite and the finite, and in His human face He radiates the very Person of God.

"Our Christian religion is not simply a doctrine, an intellectual pronouncement, or a formula. It is rather an action and a fact. The Incarnation of God is a historical fact of life that happened at one time in the history of the people of Israel, and in a specific town of Galilee called Nazareth, as related in the Gospel:

And in the sixth month the Angel Gabriel was sent from God...

Archbishop Joseph quotes the Gospel. You can look up and find his full quote on page 271 of the Prayer Book—the Gospel for the Annunciation (Lk 1. 26-38)

After sharing this, the Archbishop continues:

“From this fact follows everything meaningful and beautiful in our life. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God of God, conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born in Bethlehem, is that very same God the peoples of the earth longed to see. Christ is not just one more in the series of generations of men, a mere product ‘of blood, of the will of the flesh, of man.’ (Jn 1.13) He is an immediate revelation of God’s being, God Himself, in our human flesh. In this last and supreme revelation God demonstrates the meaning of humanity which is now in Christ a new creation saved and divinized.

“When God decided to show us His face, so that we could see Him in person and not die or be lost or bewildered by perceiving the impossible to perceive, He covered His glory and His infinite brilliance with an appearance we can approach and understand: He became man. He appeared on earth in our human face and thus did away with all our vague dissimulations and abstract notions about Him. He tore up all the masks that humanity had used for Him. He was now directly and fully present in the transparency of our humanity. On that night God showed Himself in a human form.

“The human mind cannot comprehend such a love by God for humanity. How can the uncircumscribed God be circumscribed in the flesh? How can a girl of our human race conceive without man’s participation? These are questions our human mind cannot answer. But in God they are a melody that He has been humming from all eternity. He made Adam out of the earth. He made the second Adam out of the flesh of a woman. The first woman came out of the rib of a man. The second man, Christ, came out of the entire being of a woman. God *“overshadowed her”*, invaded her, shook every fiber of her body, and drew from her most intimate reality a human nature that belonged to Him and to all humanity. The problems and hesitations our human mind encounters in this drama the archangel solved by saying, “What is impossible to man is possible to God.” (Lk 1.37)

Archbishop Joseph notes, “The human mind cannot comprehend such a love by God for humanity.” That is simply beyond our pay grade as some would say.

We cannot comprehend it BUT that is not a barrier to experiencing that love, participating in it, or sharing it.

Perhaps, as we develop the virtues, as we perform acts of mercy—corporal and spiritual, others will recognise the presence of God in us. I would go so far as to say that, as a Church, this should be our best communications asset. We know that we are called manifest this love and I know that you do it well.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” (II Cor. 2.2-3)

To manifest this love—to love—is, actively, to do something and not just think about it or meditate on it. We do it because, as St. Paul tells us “...the love of Christ constrains us...” (II Cor. 5.14)

I have always been impressed that the Acts of Corporal and Spiritual Mercy are expressed in verb form rather than by nouns. We are to forgive wrong, to pray for others, to comfort the afflicted, to feed the hungry, to shelter the stranger, to visit the sick, and so on. There are many charitable organisations which have as their goal things like feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, or whatever,. While we are certainly not discouraged by the Scriptures from sending support through those organisations and there are examples of group support in the epistles, we are actively directed to doing these things at a personal level as well.

It is part of the spiritual direction that we have been given by the Church and the Holy Scriptures that we shall do these things. The development of relationships at the personal level is so important. Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Mt. 7:21)

There was a lesson about the personal aspect of giving that I learned a number of years ago and I do tend to learn things the hard way.

There was a request that I received that I send one copy of everything that the Convent Society had on its list to a particular person in Africa. The parcels were heavy and definitely not cheap to mail. After a couple of months I received a simple notice that the shipment had been received safely and intact. At only a couple of months it was actually rather quick parcel service to that part of the world.

I pursued a correspondence on the subject and finally received a very gracious letter explaining that the major part of the shipment was totally irrelevant to the local context. This was all printed material. Aside from the fact that the glued bindings would not hold up under the weather and humidity conditions and that many of the people did not speak nor read English, the content of the material reflected so much the culture, the economics, the politics of the West—North America and Western Europe. Some of these things were quite subtle from my perspective but outstanding in parts of Africa. This situation has given me pause to think about giving and whether my giving is really for the benefit of the recipient or just to make me feel good about having given something.

The 19th century hymn-writer Bishop Phillips Brooks wrote the beautiful and popular Christmas hymn, O little town of Bethlehem. A couple of verses into the hymn we hear the words

How silently, how silently, The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts The blessings of his heaven: