

## Christmas 2022

All over these days, even in the challenging weather, people are crowding airports, bus and train stations, and highways, traveling to be with the ones they love. *If you are visiting us this Christmas, we welcome you and thank you for being with us.* Joseph, too, had a journey to make; but this trip from Nazareth to his ancestral home was not one he had chosen. Answering the demand of the Roman census, he took his pregnant wife and yet unborn Child and returned to Bethlehem, a town whose name in Hebrew literally means “house of bread.” I wonder if Joseph reflected on the irony of this destination: once the City of David, the King; now just one more small town that didn’t really count in an occupied land. Long centuries ago, Micah had prophesied that the Ruler of Israel would come from this village, a Shepherd for his people Whose greatness would reach to the ends of the earth. But now, even for a mother about to give birth, Joseph could not so much as rent a spot to sleep. *The promised glory of the past now seemed so empty ... inspiring words, perhaps, but they did nothing to solve the practical problems he faced.* And so, probably with a heavy heart, Joseph did the best he could for his family: probably a cave filled with animals, and for a cradle, their feeding trough. It had all seemed so clear when he woke from his dream nine months before. And while he still believed, I expect that Joseph shook his head in some confusion.

*Yet precisely when God’s words of promise seemed irrelevant and even impossible, they were being fulfilled.* This is the way of God: to make Himself small so we can accept Him; to speak quietly and simply so we must pause to listen; to work gradually and patiently to weave Hope into human history and work salvation from within ... not to overwhelm with external power, but to offer and invite Love, revealing God with a human face, an infant’s face. The Son of God becomes the Son of Mary, a helpless Baby, *one of us now*, to live through every moment and every weakness of the human condition. Christmas teaches us that no matter what our struggles, we need never fear that God does not understand, could not still embrace us ... for He has embraced everything that can happen to us, even our death, to set us free.

In the silence of that night, far from the halls of earthly power and greatness, the Word through Whom all things were made was spoken into a world distracted by its own noise. In that obscure poverty, the Bread of Life began proclaiming wordlessly from the manger: ***“This is My Body, which will be given up for you.”*** Could even Mary have understood, as she cradled her Baby in her arms, that she would once again hold her Son some thirty years later, once again silenced in death, having truly “given up” that Body on the Cross? Who would have foreseen that night in the cave that from yet another cave, silent and unseen, a stone would be rolled away and the life that has no end would emerge, the healing of sin and death finally accomplished by the self-emptying that began on the Silent Night?

Jesus Christ has come to be with the ones He loves. He forever weaves together divine Love and human history with the Presence of God, Love come in Person. This Love, this Body, is given to us over and over in the Eucharist, for Jesus never stops coming to us. We too hold the Creator and Redeemer of all, as Mary held Jesus in her arms, with a Mother’s love for her child, and a believer’s love for her God.

Each Christmas still finds much weariness, sorrow, and suffering in the world – hopes disappointed, peace so elusive, worry and sickness and loss that preoccupy us and test our strength. ***We too might wonder if all the inspiring words of promise are empty, of no real help in the practical difficulties we face.*** Yet Christmas reminds us, and consoles us, that God is not a distant Power, nor a religious belief no longer irrelevant for the modern world and its needs, but Emmanuel ... God with us. God has not forgotten us, has not abandoned us, and will never leave us without help. This is the true and greatest Christmas Gift, given by God with unfailing love. The same angels who filled the skies over Bethlehem continue to announce to us a joy beyond all sorrow, a light beyond all darkness, a hope beyond all weariness, a Love greater even than death. Jesus has come to be with the ones He loves. ***Come, let us adore Him ... Christ, the Lord.***