

Christmas Night 2021  
(Isaiah 9:1-7 / Titus 2:11-14 / Luke 2:1-14)  
25.12.2021

St Luke's Gospel account draws to our attention the precise moment in history when Christ appeared on earth in the person of the child born in Bethlehem who became known as Jesus of Nazareth.

We celebrate the Saviour's birth tonight at this precise moment in time: in the year of Our Lord 2021.

We do so aware of all that is going on in the world around us; aware as well of all that is going on in the life of the People of God, the Church, of which we are part. We will also be conscious of what is going on in our personal, family and community lives.

It is at this precise moment in time – in what the Sacred Liturgy calls this *Hodie*, in this today – at the very heart of this particular night that Christ comes to assure us that He is with us and that in Him is our salvation.

While our thoughts turn back tonight to what happened in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago, they should also, and above all, be focused on the Lord's coming to us in the here and now of our existence.

Our celebration of Christmas cannot satisfy itself to be simply a matter of nostalgia. It has to be rooted in the real.

Just as the Christ appeared in the infant of Bethlehem 2,000 years ago – weak and helpless, poor and vulnerable, a child of no great social significance whatsoever, so today still Christ makes His presence felt with and within us in weakness and helplessness, poverty and vulnerability... our own particular weakness and helplessness, our own poverty and vulnerability, to begin with; and that of our entourage as well.

May we be attentive to recognise and to receive the Lord who comes to us in this manner! May we be vigilant not to allow pious nostalgia or fanciful imagination to rob the Christian Christmas of its real value!

The real value of a Christian Christmas is that as we celebrate the mystery of our Saviour's birth in a way that leaves the Lord free to strike and to strengthen us precisely where we find ourselves and how we feel ourselves to be deep down within.

Paul Tillich reminds us where and how grace strikes God's People – each and every one of us. He declares in his famous work 'Shaking the Foundations': Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. Tillich goes on to make this claim: Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying, 'You are accepted'. For Tillich to marvel: In the light of this grace we perceive that everything is transformed.

May grace strike our broken, suffering world tonight!

May it strike Christ's wounded, battered and bruised Body, the Church!

May grace strike our own poor, weak and lowly lives!

With the first Christmas event God took a generous initiative in regard to the human race. With the first Christmas event grace struck our world and transformed it by the great Christian revolution that ensued.

Our longing on this Christmas night should be for a renewed strike of grace. It should be that our world, the Church, all of us, be given fresh hope and brought to new birth!

Jesus' birth in history – that first Christmas 2,000 years ago – was a most amazing grace whose sweet taste we have not yet ceased to savour. May God's grace strike us afresh this Christmas night. May we savour it throughout all the coming Christmas days and far over and beyond them!

The call and challenge for all of us is to keep Christ in Christmas. It is to see everything as God sees it: in the light of His grace revealed in Christ-Jesus.

As we keep the Solemn Feast of the Incarnation in the somewhat strange circumstances of the present pandemic may we not lose hope of healing and restoration of which we stand in need.

With the birth of Christ Jesus in Bethlehem God's transforming grace has appeared among us. All is made new. God has entered into time. He has espoused the history of our troubled world. He comes to bring us peace.

Looking upon Christian communities gathered for worship on this Holy Night – aware that many are held back from joining with brothers and sisters in the faith to celebrate the grace of Christ's coming to be with His People, the Lord reaches out to us. He comes to reassure our fearful hearts and touch our wounded souls. He offers His consolation and peace to each one of us. He whispers gently into the ear of our hearts those words of the Introit of this Holy Night: You are my beloved child in whom I am well-pleased. That promise was given to us in the ancient chant heard towards the beginning of the Liturgy of this Holy Night: Dominus dixit ad me: 'Filius Meus es tu. Ego hodie genui te'. The Lord said to me: 'You are my son (my child). This day I have begotten you'.

Amen!