

Sunday within the Octave of Christmas

Beloved, today's worship calls us to reflect on the wonder of our Lord's incarnation and the grace it signifies and gives us pause to think why Christmas has happened and the power of its truth. For these reasons Holy Church opens today's Mass liturgy with two verses from the Book of Wisdom: *When all things were in quiet silence.*

The Jews of the Old Testament had a particular veneration for the wisdom literature. The verses which make up the opening chant of today's Mass place this wisdom passage within its true, Messianic, context: *When a profound stillness encompassed everything and the night in its swift course was half spent . . . Thy almighty Word, O Lord, leaped down from heaven's royal throne.*

As often as the Jews read this passage they never grasped its true meaning. And thus, on the first Christmas night when *His own knew Him not* as St. John the Evangelist tells us, *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.* The Word spoken from all eternity by the heavenly Father was His only-begotten Son. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.* This one line from the Gospels, so often repeated in the liturgy, is a profound meditation on the mystery of God's love for all mankind. Could there be a more apt description of the eternal generation of the Son of God?

Here then, in the course of a long-lost winter's night, the luminous clarity of God's eternal splendor descended from heaven and was laid by gentle Mary into the poverty, obscurity and rejection of an animal's manger. Born to such rejection by men, the Savior's birth was heralded instead by a host of angels instead: *Glory to God in the highest . . .* and though this story is so familiar, we must never forget the profound reality it represents.

Our Lord's appearance in this world was not in the presence of royal splendor nor the politically important. Apart from His mother and Saint Joseph His first witnesses were simple shepherds watching their flocks. It is in deepest conformity to the reality of the Savior's mission that His birth should have taken place in such poverty and obscurity – for this Child is a sign of wonder and contradiction, a corner stone for some and a stumbling block to others. Christ, by His mere presence, implies a choice for all men on their busy and oftentimes mindless path. It is for us to welcome into our lives Him Whom each one – for his eternal salvation or perdition – must receive or reject. Shall we accept this Almighty Word into our lives by a true conformity to His reign over us? Or shall we remain dead to His grace by the merely external appearance of religion – an empty practice of self-deception?

Beloved, let us truly awake to the new Light which is now born to us; let us join our hearts and voices to those of Blessed Mary and Saint Joseph, the angels from glory, the simple shepherds: for it is the small ones of this world who are privileged to accept Christ more readily into their hearts. Let us live for Him without equivocation. Let us lead others to Him by the charity we have for God – and our neighbor for the true love of God. For here, lying in the Christmas manger is none other than the eternal Word of the Father, Who invites us this day to true life . . . and should we bend our wills to accept such wondrous mercy, that we may have it in all abundance.