



Sunday Mass Homily on a Christmas Eve Morning

If you watch the news today, you often will hear a report about the United States Air Force radar tracking a large sled, pulled by reindeers, with the chunky bearded fellow in a red suit driving it. They are reporting that the loaded vehicle is scheduled to arrive over Long Island around midnight tonight. If we could get into a time machine and go back 2017 years ago, we would see a young lady, nine months pregnant, sitting on a donkey and being guided by a young tired looking man. They had been traveling through the dusty roads from Nazareth to the town of Bethlehem for almost a week. At long last they were on the outskirts of the town, and both were near exhaustion, both from the stress of the trip and the concern for the birth of the child. Each had come to know that the lives they had expected to have as husband and wife had dramatically changed in the past few months. Joseph had dreamed of a carpenter shop filled with sons, earning an honest living and providing for his wife Mary and their children. Mary carried so many thoughts and feelings in her heart. What was God asking of me? Was that truly an angel or just my imagination? The Messiah, the Son of God. Who am I but a lowly Jewish girl from tiny hamlet. Is it? What would this day bring? What was

to become of this miraculous child conceived by the Spirit of God. Is it wrong for me to even think I could be the mother of the long-awaited Messiah? What awaits us in Bethlehem. The Roman Rulers demanded we be counted in a census and my beloved spouse was from the house of King David in Bethlehem. Where will stay? Who will help with the birth of this baby. I afraid but I trust in God. I have heard his word and now bear him in my womb. Throughout the week, as devout Jews, they had prayed to their God, begging to be faithful to his covenant.

Let us now have our time machine bring us to present day Bethlehem. There is great activity in the city as pilgrims from all over the world prepared to celebrate the nativity of Jesus at the very site where he was born. They eagerly anticipate the midnight Mass. With the recent decision of the United States to move its embassy to Jerusalem, the usual anxiety about terrorism are even more heightened. Young Israeli soldiers, sub machine guns strung across their shoulders study every person as they come and go in the streets of Bethlehem. Many Palestinians looked the soldiers with hatred as once did the Jews look at their Roman conquerors. Christians Arabs, as a persecuted minority in the Bethlehem are nervous. What will this night bring? All are struck by the irony that all this boiling anger and resentment is still happening in the very town where the Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace was born. When we will turn away from hatred and see one another as brothers and sisters as Christ taught.

In Bethpage, many are coming and going from St. Martin's Church as they continue to adore and worship Jesus. A few call the rectory and ask what time is the midnight Mass while others ask if they go to Mass tonight if it counts for both Sunday and Christmas. The family cooks are making sure they have all their need to prepare the great dinner of the seven fishes. Last minute wrapping of gifts is being done. Little children are asking when is Santa coming and to make sure to leave some sugar free cookies and low-fat milk out for him. Dads are praying that the gifts did not have the dreaded words: some assembly required, or batteries not included. The pastor is nervously checking weather reports and begging God to not listen to Bing Crosby dream for a White Christmas.

Now, a last trip back to first century crowded Bethlehem. There are shepherds out in the fields. Just another day of caring for the sheep. They hope for night that is not cold and no roaming sheep. One day is the same as the next: nothing exciting ever happens in Bethlehem and nobody ever pays any attention to shepherds. A few notice a bright star, so bright they can even see in the daylight. Strange, but no time for looking at stars, there are rooms to be rented and meals to served.

A weary young man with his pregnant wife is anxiously asking about a room for his wife. People laugh and say you are too late-all the rooms are filled. Joseph tries more house. He will explain that is wife Mary is about to give birth. He knocks on the door. The innkeeper sees the desperation in his eyes. His heart is touched by the sight of the mother to be on the donkey. He responds, All I can offer is a stable. In Persia, wise men are loading their camel as they prepare to follow a strange star shining over Bethlehem. Angels are hovering all over the fields of Bethlehem. The promise made centuries ago is about to be fulfilled. God' son is about to be born in Bethlehem. Let us come and adore him.