

Second Sunday of Christmas

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

The mystery of the Incarnation is of such theological profundity and of such importance to our understanding of the salvation won for us by Jesus of Nazareth, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, that the Church extends the celebration over a period of eight intense days (the Octave of Christmas) and then keeps the Christmas story before our eyes for a further week or more so that through liturgical prayer, the proclamation of the scriptures which relate the Nativity and its aftermath and meditation, especially in contemplation of the crib, on the story, our faith in what it signifies be deepened. And the hope too is that we derive as much spiritual fruit as possible from the Christmas Octave and the extended period of Christmastide.

Up until now the only people admitted to knowledge of what had happened in Bethlehem were the shepherds and those with whom they shared the good news announced to them by the angels and confirmed by their visit to the manger. They were literally and figuratively on the margins of the Jewish society of their day. And yet it was to them the good news was first announced, it was they who first laid eyes on the baby Jesus. Soon they were to be joined by two other Israelites, a devout man and woman who were frequent in their attendance in the Jerusalem temple yet did not belong either to the priestly or the ruling class of contemporary Jewish society, Simeon and Anna. Jesus had been wrapped in swaddling clothes by his mother Mary but the news of his birth too had been kept under wraps, it was a secret known to a few who, thanks to the appearance of the angels and to the prompting of God's Spirit, not only saw the new-born child but also understood that in him God had made good on the promises he had made for generations to the Jewish people. This weekend we explore a little further what the birth of Jesus meant, in what way and with what intention God entered the world through the Word becoming flesh. All of the events and mysteries we have celebrated up until now are primarily "good news" for the Jews. And yet within days, in the person of the wise men/kings who brought three gifts to the new-born king, we the gentiles are present at the manger.

The Solemnity of the Epiphany is the Christmas of all of us who do not belong to the chosen people. The wise men represent those throughout the world who, responding to their in-born religious instinct, go in search of truth and ultimately respond to the Truth represented in the new-born king. Herod, with malevolent intent, requested of the wise men that, having discovered where the child was, they come back and "tell him all about this child." We are benignly curious about this child, we want to know more about Jesus but also desire to know him better. And it is precisely for that reason that from one end of the year to the other we celebrate his saving mission, we rejoice in his permanent risen presence among us and deepen our knowledge of him and his message so as to follow more faithfully in his footsteps.

Father Patrick