

JOY TO THE WORLD!!!

(The Word became flesh and dwells among us.)

The Roman Martyrology for Christmas Day contains a formal announcement of the birth of Christ in the style of a proclamation. It reads as follows.

Today, the twenty-fifth day of December, unknown ages from the time when God created the heavens and the earth and then formed man and woman in his own image.

Several thousand years after the flood, when God made the rainbow shine forth as a sign of covenant. Twenty-one centuries from the tie of Abraham and Sarah, thirteen centuries after Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt. Eleven hundred years from the time of Ruth and the Judges; one thousand years from the anointing of David as king; in the sixty-fifth week according to the prophecy of Daniel.

In the one hundred and ninety-fourth Olympiad; the seven hundred and fifty-second year from the foundation of the city of Rome.

The forty-second year of the reign of Octavian Augustus, the whole world being at peace, Jesus Christ, eternal God and Son the eternal Father, desiring to sanctify the world by his most merciful coming, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, and nine months having passed since his conception, was born in Bethlehem of Judea of the Virgin Mary. Today is the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh.

Father Bill Wegher of Ann Arbor Michigan tells the following story on himself. His niece is now sixteen.

He was tired and visiting his brother at his brother's home before Christmas. "After I had been at their home for a while, my god-daughter, Shelby who was two and one-half years old, took me by the hand and asked, 'Uncle Bill, do you want to see something?' "Sure,' I obliged as I reluctantly pulled myself out of the comfortable chair to follow her tugging hand. She took me over to the coffee table on which her mother had placed a fragile white porcelain nativity scene in anticipation of Christmas. As I knelt down to be at her eye level, she pointed to the infant Jesus and said, 'See!'

I was overjoyed! Amid all the consumerism and commercialism that surround Christmas these days, here was a child who was just beginning to speak and who was showing me the true meaning of Christmas already. This beautiful little girl was about to tell me the story of Jesus' birth. To top it all off, she was my god-daughter!

Filled with pride, I asked her, 'Shelby, do you know what this is?' She nodded her head in the affirmative. 'Can you tell Uncle Bill about it?' Again, she nodded her head to say, 'Yes.' 'What is it?' I finally asked, filled with anticipation. In the most innocent and matter of fact way, she responded, 'Breakable!'"

Breakable. Indeed. Not only porcelain crèches are breakable but us too. We human beings are breakable and we do break. Our hearts sometimes break. Our

relationships sometimes break and our sense of self sometimes breaks. Sometimes the insight of a child leads us to a truth deeper than we realize. This little girl is just learning how to speak. Infants cannot. As a matter of fact, the etymology of the word, infant, is precisely that: one who cannot speak. So, I find it at least ironic and perhaps a bit mysterious when the Eternal Word of God chooses to become an infant, chooses to become one who cannot speak.

The very Word of God becomes one who cannot speak; becomes one who will have to learn a language and the means of expression used by his family and friends and only gradually learn how to speak in this language and only then to begin to speak God's word to us. We hear this in the prologue to the Gospel of Saint John: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh." Yes. But in our lives too does word become flesh. When a man and a woman gather all their family and friends in one place to ask God's blessing and to make promises of love—I will love you and honor you all the days of my life—the child that is later born of their loving embrace is also word made flesh but we do not always think of it in those terms.

But there are other ways too. When someone speaks a word to me that lifts my heart and soul and gives me life and hope then that word too has become flesh. And when another speaks a word that stings and hurts and bursts my balloon that word too goes in and becomes flesh as well. Word has that power because word is of God and God has that power.

But here is the fascinating thing. When love is born in my heart it can stay there and feed me but you may or may not ever know. It is only when I give voice to the love within me can it become flesh in you. But my love is not lost to me in the uttering. It is still in my heart but now it is in your heart too. Now it has become flesh. I lose nothing but gain everything. Love is not like everything else. We can never use up our quota of love. The reality is that love is the one unlimited thing in our lives. We are made in the image and likeness of God and God is love, unlimited, forever love. And the more we love the more we can love. In giving it away we lose nothing but gain everything.

Two things this Christmas. I want you to pay attention to the words you speak today. I want you to listen to what you say, and how you say it, the tone that you use. Be aware of the power of your word for good or ill. Secondly, as difficult as it is I want you to try to find a quiet place today and just listen for the Word of the Lord. I want you to listen for God to speak to you. You must be still for this to happen. You must turn off all the music and external noise and simply be quiet. The Lord speaks but the Lord whispers and we have to be attentively listening in order to hear but hear we can. God still desires to speak a word that takes flesh—in you and me. Do not resist but be open to it. Mary and Joseph did and behold they brought forth the Savior of the world. Dare to believe. Dare to trust. Merry Christmas!