



Homily Christmas –Midnight Mass SFC, 2008

Most Rev. Jose H. Gomez
Archbishop of San Antonio

My sisters and brothers in Christ:

“Awake, mankind! For your sake God has become man. Awake, you who sleep rise up from the dead and Christ will enlighten you. I tell you again: for your sake, God became man” (St. Augustine, Liturgy of the Hours).

We gather tonight to celebrate the unique and extraordinary event -human and divine- of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. As the Entrance antiphon of tonight Mass says: “Let us all rejoice in the Lord, for our Savior is born to the world. True peace has descended from heaven”

The celebration of Christmas begins with a proclamation of good news. It was first announced by the Prophets as the 1st reading reminds us: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone ... For a child is born to us, a son is given us...”

He will be the Messiah: “Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace”. The Chosen people were waiting for him for a long time and finally He came and that’s what we celebrate with great joy!

Then on that holy night, **Nochebuena**, an angel of heaven announces to the shepherds that the Savior has been born. It is good news that cannot be contained. It is announced and celebrated in heaven and on earth by glorious angelic choirs and lowly shepherds.

The 2nd reading for the letter of St. Paul to Titus talks to us about Jesus Christ, our God and savior: “The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly and devoutly in this age”

This is what we celebrate tonight, God who makes himself present among us in the person of His only Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ! “For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ the Lord” The Angel said to the Shepherds.

Every year we come to contemplate the mystery of the Nativity of Jesus to celebrate God’s love for us and to try to discover new ways to learn from God’s love for us.

Maybe tonight we can reflect on the most basic and beautiful lesson from the Nativity scene: a little defenseless baby, who is our Lord and Savior: Jesus Christ.

Isn't amazing that a little baby is the one coming to save us from our sins, bringing God's love, meaning for our lives and salvation to humanity?

At the center of the divine drama of the incarnation are two expectant mothers. Mary, our Blessed Mother and her cousin, St. Elizabeth, who just gave birth to St. John the Baptist. We don't often stop to think of how unusual that is.

In fact, what we hear in the Gospel tonight is something that's unheard of in the history of world religions. What other great world religion remembers the time when its founder was in his mother's womb and the story of its birth?

Yet in our Scriptures, we preserve the story of Jesus' conception, his birth, and even some events from his early childhood. We retell these stories in our liturgy, season after season, year after year. We remember the name of Jesus' mother in our confession of faith. Every day we affirm that he was "born of the Virgin Mary ..."

We don't think much about what this all means. But we should. Because it is something quite extraordinary. Again, it's a feature of our faith that's totally unique among all the religions of the world.

It really talks to us about the dignity of human life. As, St. Leo the Great said: "Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition"

Christmas is a celebration of life, from conception to natural death. In this story we see that every life is precious to God, that before we are formed in the womb, God has a plan for our lives.

Because life is a gift from God, we must strive to protect and defend our brothers and sisters, especially the tiniest and most tender among us: from the child in the womb to the elderly and the handicapped, to the immigrant who comes to our land seeking a new life for his family.

As we contemplate the Child Jesus we want to tell him that we love him and that we want to learn from him. This example of the love of God for us should inspire in all our hearts a deep desire to help others, especially, those less fortunate than us.

Let's make sure that we correspond to God's love, loving Him and loving others.

We especially ask Jesus tonight to grant us faith and hope. As we go through the difficult times of an economic crisis in our country we need to keep in mind that with God nothing is impossible. On Christmas, the impossible is made true and our hearts are filled with hope.

Yes, my sisters and brothers, Christmas is about Hope. We need hope in our trouble world as the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, said some time ago and I like to repeat it because it is a beautiful truth: "**Hope has a face, a name: Jesus Christ, 'God with us.'**" A world without God

is a world without hope, and a culture without God, at heart, desperate and inevitably (without doubt) becomes a culture of death”.

As I recently wrote: “It is our faith that is the ultimate stimulus package that can energize us to work for the common good, so that we will build a society on the foundation of love and hope upon which we can build a culture of life, dedicated to providing “liberty and justice for all.”

So, as we rejoice in the birth of Jesus, let’s pray to the newborn Child, to his Mother Mary and to Saint Joseph, that this Christmas may be a time for Jesus to be born anew in our hearts, in our families and in our communities. May it be for all of us a Blessed and Merry Christmas! Amen.