

## **Christmas (Luke 2:1-14)**

For us who dwell in the land of darkness and gloom, a light has shone as Isaiah tells us. For us who have walked in that darkness, we have seen a great light, as our Gospel reassures us. Few can deny that our world seems a land of darkness and gloom. We are torn apart by constant and often senseless warfare. We see a world of political corruption, and deceit. The corporate world is infected with crime and greed. We encounter violence on the streets of our cities. Hypocrisy, and lust for power seem to rule leaders around the world. Some families are afflicted with spousal abuse and child abuse. Children who should be unconditionally loved are often not valued and nurtured in our society. We encounter substance abuse, drugs and alcohol among our families and friends, and a variety of other addictions as well. We walk down the street and are confronted by the homeless and the hungry. We hear of tribal warfare in Palestine, the land of Jesus, and in countless other parts of the world.

For us who dwell in the land of darkness and gloom, a light has shone. Jesus, the light, was born into a gloomy world of an ancestry that included a few heroes. Many of his ancestors, however, were noted liars, thieves, adulterers, murderers, and cheats, a lot of rotten apples not worthy of redemption. Jesus was born in the lineage of David, the reformed adulterer and murderer.

And today, we see Mary and Joseph gathered around the manger, the feeding trough, welcoming the little one who is to redeem us. Jesus' heavenly Father, passionately in love with us, we who are made in his image, male and female, sends us a gift, the gift of himself in human form. The shepherds, outcasts of society because they were non-observers of the law, look on in wonderment, men marginalized and on the fringe of society, perhaps prophetic of the type of people Jesus would spend a lot of time with as an adult, the sinners, and tax collectors, and the common people, perhaps much like us.

"Today a savior is born to you." He comes to lift burdens, to cast out fear, to heal our woundedness, to touch us in the places where we need to be touched, for he knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows the places in us that need healing and hope. He brings tidings of great joy, for in him we have seen a great light. The gloom and darkness have been cast out. He lies in the manger, the feeding trough. And in the feeding trough he continues to be found, for he continues to feed us with himself, the Bread of Life, at the Eucharistic banquet where we now gather. Let us give thanks. Let us rejoice. "Today a savior is born to you."

Al Grosskopf, S.J.

## **Holy Family Sunday B (Luke 2:22-40)**

On this Holy Family Sunday, we are aware that a parish community is obviously made up of families. As we look around, we are struck by the fact that families are varied in structure. Most families have two parents, a father and a mother. Some are single parent families with only a mother or a father, touched by the pain of loss through divorce or death. They vary according to race- white, black, Asian, Hispanic and a variety of combinations and mixtures. Some of these families are poor, a few are affluent, and most are of modest but adequate means. But all of the families I've met have at least one thing in common. They all have problems.

At the time of marriage, most couples, like Mary and Joseph, have no idea what problems their marriage may face. For most of the couples I have prepared for marriage, the romantic glow was operative, and future problems to be shared remained unanticipated. Mary and Joseph, given a glimpse of the future,

were amazed at what the righteous and devout old Simeon foretold about the infant Jesus and his mission to both the gentiles and the Jews. And his words of foreboding to Mary spoke of her heart being pierced by a sword of sorrow, a foreshadowing of her son's suffering and death on a cross.

One of the questions in the FOCCUS instrument used to prepare couples for marriage asks about the expectations of problems in marriage, even though the couple may love each other. Problems will indeed arise, even though love may be present. It's how the problem is handled that counts. St. Paul speaks to this need in his letter to the Colossians. "Put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another." "Let the peace of Christ control your hearts. Be thankful."

One big problem often evident in families is a lack of communication. Many family problems could be prevented or solved with better communication, listening not just to words, but to actions giving clues to deeper meanings. If people talk and listen to each other, good things can happen. If we fail to talk and listen to each other, misunderstandings occur. Three little sentences could work wonders in most families. First: "I was wrong." Second: "I'm sorry." Third: "Will you forgive me?" The power of those three little sentences to heal relationships is amazing. But sadly, they often go unsaid. And parents and children sometimes keep distance for an entire lifetime, carrying around resentments and hidden anger which come out in inappropriate ways. A lack of communication is often the source of family problems. Seemingly, Mary and Joseph were good communicators; they passed along to Jesus his ability to grow strong, filled with wisdom, "and the favor of God was upon him," as our Gospel tells us. Mary and Joseph have a powerful message for parents. Surround your children with attention, listen to them, listen to God, protect children at all costs, take risks, put their welfare above your own needs and desires. In this is found your joy as parents and the building of nurturing families. And so we celebrate the wonderful humanity of Jesus, learned in the Holy Family, as he reveals to us the astounding love that God has for us, his people, so astounding that He became one of us and continues to love us dearly. Let us give thanks.

Al Grosskopf, S.J.

### **EPIPHANY (Matt 2:1-12)**

Today is the feast of the Epiphany, and we all recall that nostalgic song, "We Three Kings of Orient Are." As a child, I looked forward to the coming of the Magi in their rich multi-colored clothing, their obvious racial diversity which fascinated me, and with their majestic camels. The Nativity scene wouldn't be complete without them. These wise men are sometimes portrayed as wealthy kings from the East, the place where wisdom traditionally resides, and they set out to find the infant king of the Jews. Pious legend has named them Balthazar, Melchior, and Casper. They were thought to be astrologers, which in those days was the closest thing they knew to the science of astronomy. They had plotted their journey guided by a star that would show them the way.

The important thing here is that they were on a journey of discovery, a journey of faith, a pilgrimage if you will. They were in search of the one who would give meaning to their lives. They delighted in following their star that led them on to the fulfilling, life-changing experience of meeting the Lord Jesus. And after their unforgettable meeting with the infant king, they returned to their country by a different road than by which they came, for their contact with Jesus had changed their lives and their way of looking at reality. They had experienced a change of heart, and even though they would perhaps resume

doing the same old things wise men did in their country, they would be on a different road, a road of hope on their journey of faith. As Henry David Thoreau stated, "Things do not change, we change." and so it was with the wise men; and so it is with all of us who allow ourselves to personally encounter the Lord Jesus. Things do not change; we change.

Our taking a new road following our encounter with the Lord Jesus is a change of heart, a turning away from and a turning to. It means a turning from idols we have set up in our lives, to God; it means a turning from slavery, from what keeps us trapped in hopelessness, to freedom of heart; from injustice to justice; from the grimy prison of guilt and resentment to forgiveness; from lies, denial, and self deception to truth which sets us free; from darkness to light; from a pre-occupation with self to the service of others in need; from death to life. Our personal conversion of heart may mean abandoning the road of fear and striking out on the road of hope. We may abandon the road of a self-constricting illusion of control to a relinquishing in faith, a surrender of control to the eminently trustworthy loving Jesus.

Our new road may lead us from despair to a joy and delight the wise men found in the source of all joy. That source of all joy may touch our hearts with a deeper compassion and love for our brothers and sisters.

Beware an encounter with the Lord Jesus. He may look like a helpless infant encountered by the wise men, but his power can be life changing as the wise men discovered. The Lord Jesus doesn't force himself on us, however. He pulls by a gentle attraction, and all we need do is be open to his leading, for he is the way that leads us gently on our journey, our pilgrimage of faith, over roads yet unexplored. Let us give thanks for his loving, guiding hand, our way, truth, and life. Let us remember him in this Eucharist together, as he asked us to do. Amen.

Al Grosskopf, S.J.