

CHRISTMAS MASS OF THE DAY, Year C

“THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION”

‘Awake, mankind! For your sake God has become man. ... You would have suffered eternal death, had he not been born in time. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had he not taken on himself the likeness of sinful flesh. You would have suffered everlasting unhappiness, had it not been for his mercy. You would not have returned to life, had he not shared your death. You would have been lost if he had not hastened to your aid. You would have perished, had he not come.’ⁱ

These words of St Augustine sum up the Christian expression of joy in the face of the mystery of the Incarnation, which is at the heart of today’s Gospel according to John (Jn. 1:14):

‘And the Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us.’

The Greek word for ‘flesh’, ‘σάρξ’ (sarx), refers to the entire human person in all its weakness and mortality. In taking on our human nature, God made himself vulnerable for our sake.

The Word ‘made his dwelling among us’. The Greek literally means that Jesus ‘tabernacled’ or ‘pitched his tent’ among us. The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, the architectural expression of God’s presence in Israel, is a prophetic image of Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of divine wisdom in the flesh.ⁱⁱ

‘The unique and ... singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God.’ⁱⁱⁱ

Belief in the Incarnation is the distinctive sign of the Christian faith. As we recite the Creed today, we genuflect at the words ‘and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.’

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states the Word became flesh:

- in order to save us by reconciling us with God,
- so that thus we might know God’s love,
- to be our model of holiness,
- and to make us partakers of the divine nature.^{iv}

The birth of Jesus Christ has transformed human history. When we gaze upon the child in the manger, we see a human face, and yet, it is the refulgence of God’s glory, the very imprint (Gk. *χαρακτηρ*, ‘charakter’) of God’s being. (Heb. 1:3)

Today, as we celebrate Christmas, may we be forever thankful for the Word of God who ‘came from the endless day of eternity into our own short day of time.’^v

ⁱ From a Sermon by St Augustine, taken from *THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS*, 1975, Vol. IV, Catholic Book Publishing Company, NY, p. 379

ⁱⁱ *IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE: NEW TESTAMENT*, 2010, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 162

ⁱⁱⁱ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 464

^{iv} *Ibid*, nn. 457-460

^v From a Sermon by St Augustine, taken from *THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS*, Vol. IV, 1975, Catholic Book Publishing Company, NY, p. 380