

## **The Nativity of the Lord: Thoughts on Christmas**

Today is born our Savior! Alleluia! We have come many times to the celebration of the Birth of Christ and each year we come with lives that have been affected by change. Who we are this year is quite different than last and what is yet to unfold in our lives will bring us to even more challenging places. Because we live with change, it is important to reflect often on the significance of today and what Christmas means as we gather together this time.

God took on human form in Jesus Christ. How important is this to us? What meaning, beyond the memories, nostalgia and symbols of Christmas, does our celebration have? What we celebrate today can permanently change us if we allow God to do what He desires.

God's original intention or desire in bringing forth the incarnation is both ordinary and profound. Immersing ourselves in and attempting to understand this tremendous mystery can unlock the door to true happiness and heavenly peace. Seeing the incarnation through the eyes of God can bring us into a more perfect relationship with God and deepen our vision of God's glory.

The night that Christ was born probably was not much different than any other night. There was the simplicity and humility of birth. Christ was born as any other child was born and those watching God's self gift to us could have easily missed what was taking place; what was rapidly changing.

God did not use magic. He did not wake the world from sleep and focus attention on the birth of His Son. God did not move mountains or summon the winds or even play trumpets for that matter. God came as life comes.

God is love and pure love came to us that first Christmas night. We know what love can do for us. We know its creative beauty and powerful presence. We know that we are not complete without it and that it can forgive the worst of sins and soften the hardest of hearts. But, love is silent. Like the wind, we see it by its effects and suffer the absence of its loss. Love does not part the oceans, command the seas, and work like magic. It is felt in the heart. Love does not change how we look; the color of our hair, the size of our bodies or anything else we can physically see. Love changes us on a level that is beyond sight.

That first Christmas night effected change that is beyond sight as well. Those who first visited that stable were not changed by what they saw but by how they felt. When they beheld Christ for the first time they were inwardly changed by an encounter with pure and eternal love. They were changed by God.

We often expect God to work outside our nature. It is almost as if our belief in God depends on whether he works magic. Our prayer tells the story. Take this away, give me that, do this for this person and cure me of this! We expect God to feed the starving,

protect the innocent, stop death and “bail us out” of the misery of life! And, when we do not see God doing these things, we begin to question our faith or even abandon the whole notion of God altogether. It is a lot easier to simply believe in what I can see and know. But, such is not real. There is much more to life than just empirical truth!

And, if we are not sure where to find God or even if there is a God we easily run the risk of becoming very lukewarm in our pursuit of him. We may go through a few of the motions “just in case” and never really uncover the truth or find our way.

When Jesus was born, God expressed in the most normal and natural way possible his unconditional, undying love for humanity. He blessed us. Think of someone in your life whom you love with all of your heart and soul; someone for whom you would risk your very life. Let’s assume that because of this love you have been forever changed. Maybe this person turned your life around or perhaps they saved you from yourself. It is possible that they gave you joy beyond belief and showed you happiness as you never knew before. Were all of these miracles done using magic? Were you even aware when, where or how all of these things were happening?

But, yet they did. You have been transformed. You have been changed. Love changed you. God changed you. We do not love on our own. Love is something that belongs to the very essence and nature of God. We love because God gives us the gift of his self. It is the gift of Christmas.

We often miss the true beauty and wonder of Christmas because our eyes are looking for something other than truth. If we truly and whole heartedly believe God’s love is above all things and before all things, then we begin to understand Christmas. Truly understanding the birth of Christ means that I am beginning to know the heart of God. It is not about how easy life can be for us or how many of our needs can be met. It is not about witnessing or receiving this miracle or moving that mountain.

Believing in the real Christmas means that I realize that beyond disappointments, struggles, conflicts and tragedies, there is love. Following the star to Bethlehem is ultimately a journey to love. It is a journey to my heart where the divine presence is found. Regardless of what life brings, choosing love brings the joy of Christmas.

There is no longer any need for anxiety or despair. Where once was total darkness, now exists only light. Where we were once lost, we are now found. And, where there was once hatred and confusion, peace is embraced. The joy of Christmas is the joy of discovering truth and truth is what shall set us free. There is nothing magical or theatrical in our celebration today. It is purely about the simple and the humble; a divine kiss from God of reassurance and love. It is a kiss that tells us to always follow the star of love and love will see us through eternally.