



**Christmas 2016
Homily**

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Saturday, 24 December 2016 & Sunday, 25 December 2016

As we gather tonight in this Cathedral, countless millions of people around the world will be doing something very similar. Beautiful cathedrals like our own, parish churches big and small, chapels in monasteries and convents, half-ruined buildings in war-torn countries, and who knows how many other places, will all be filled to overflowing as people come to celebrate an event so overwhelming that many people, perhaps including members of our own families or circles of friends and acquaintances, simply find it impossible to believe. And what is that event? It is one which for most people is in a sense mundane and yet always miraculous for those intimately involved: the birth of a baby.

For us as Christians, of course, it is a birth like no other. And this is true not just because of the extraordinary events which the Gospels record around the birth of this child - the songs of angels, the appearance of a star, the journeying of wise men from distant lands, and of course the unheard of accounts of a virginal conception, strange dreams, and other mysterious happenings. Beyond all this, strange and mysterious though it all is, the birth of the child in Bethlehem tells of something even stranger: the appearance of the mighty creator God, without whom nothing can exist, now coming among us as a fragile, helpless, vulnerable baby.

There are many ways in which we can understand the significance of the birth of Jesus. We speak of him as the Messiah, as our Saviour, as the Son of God, and so on. Some understand him to be a great prophet, a significant religious figure among many such figures, some even see him as a kind of social reformer or even a dreamy idealist. For me at least Jesus is, more than anything else, the unveiler, the revealer in human form, of the face of the one true God.

If God exists, which our presence here tonight affirms in the strongest way, and if God is inviting us into a relationship with him, then the question of who God really is and what God is really like, and what God is asking of us, becomes the most important question any of us can ask. It is the question which every religion, each in its own way, seeks to answer. As Christians we believe that Jesus is God's definitive and final and complete answer - because in Jesus God shows himself, reveals himself and offers himself to us. Everything we need to know about God is there to be discovered in Jesus.

And what does God show us in Jesus? One way to answer that question, at least in part, is to spend time, either literally tonight in the Cathedral or more generally within our own minds and hearts, gazing carefully and thoughtfully upon the scene in the stable at Bethlehem where God lies in a manger helpless, vulnerable, unprotected apart from his mother and Joseph, totally available to us.



This is the challenge of Christmas. Dare I believe that God, to whom I owe all that I am and all that I have, has chosen to become weak among the strong, helpless among the powerful, simple among the sophisticated, and needy among the self-sufficient, in order to help me understand where true greatness, genuine humanity, and the fullness of life are really to be found?

Jesus once said to his disciples, "*Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest*". This invitation is God's invitation to each one of us, spoken to us in and through Jesus who is both Son of God and our brother at the same time. God has made himself one of us so that we can come to him easily, trustfully and simply, as brother to brother and as a child to our loving father.

My prayer tonight is that each one of us will hear this invitation ringing in our hearts like a Christmas bell, a bell that will spur us on to come to Bethlehem and see the one whose birth the angels sing.