



Christmas 2018

Homily

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Tuesday 25 December 2018
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth

I have never been to the Church of the Nativity, the Church in Bethlehem, which tradition tells us is built over the place where Jesus was born. Those who have been there tell me that to enter the Church you have to go through a very low door. Many people suggest that the entrance was built in this way as a means of defence to stop soldiers riding their horses into the Church in order to vandalise it. Others suggest that this small entrance replaced an earlier, much grander entrance, which was reserved for kings, emperors and princes. That entrance was closed as a way of saying that every person, no matter their wealth or social standing, was equally welcome in this holy place.

In one of his Christmas homilies, Pope Benedict XVI suggested a deeper meaning to this small entrance door. *"If we want to find God who appeared to us as a child,"* said the Pope, *"then we must dismount from the high horse of our 'enlightened' reason. We must set aside our false certainties, our intellectual pride, which prevents us from recognising God's closeness. We must bend down in order to pass through the door of faith to encounter the God who is so different to our prejudices and opinions - the God who conceals himself in the humility of a new-born baby".*

Many people who are fascinated by and deeply admiring of Jesus believe that the greatest mistake the early Church made was to believe that Jesus was God. They are very eager to acknowledge that Jesus was a great man, and perhaps one of the greatest who ever lived. If they believe in God they are often very ready to agree that Jesus had a closer relationship with God than anyone else. But to believe that Jesus, born into a simple family in a humble stable in an out-of-the-way town called Bethlehem, was actually God himself - this just seems too incredible, perhaps even too ridiculous, to be believed.

And yet this is exactly what the Church teaches us. It is what we profess every time we recite the Creed at Mass. Jesus is *"God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God"*. While this is a mystery far beyond our capacity to fully understand, one of the most important things this belief opens up for us is this: that when we listen to the voice of Jesus, we are listening to the voice of God. When we see the compassion and forgiveness and healing power of Jesus we are encountering the God whose love for us knows no limits. And when we unite ourselves with Jesus, in our minds and in our hearts and in our desires, and especially when we unite ourselves with him in the Eucharist, we find ourselves in a communion of great intimacy and friendship with God. And in doing all this we not only find God but also our true selves, for we are most fully ourselves, and our best selves, when we know ourselves to be living in God.



All of this begins in a very real sense when Jesus, God himself, is born of Mary in the simple stable in Bethlehem. As we contemplate the mystery set before us in the Christmas Crib, we might ask ourselves this question: do I dare to believe that God really is as Jesus shows him to be? That God is loving, and forgiving; that God is merciful and kind; that God wishes to draw me into a life of intimacy and deep friendship with him; that God is longing to share his life with me now, and forever in eternity? If we can believe this - if we are brave enough and bold enough to believe that we can be, and are, loved and cherished so much by God - then we will begin to experience the joy of living in a way we never have before. And this is the Christmas gift the Lord offers us tonight.

But just as the small door into the Church of the Nativity can only be passed through if we bow low, so we will only be able to grasp the enormity, and the beauty and the power of this most basic truth of Christmas if we, as Pope Benedict says, dismount from the high horse of our false certainties and intellectual pride and, in simplicity and humility, recognise the presence of the living God in the fragile child whose birth we celebrate tonight. May this, the gift of humility and simplicity which we see reflected in the face of the infant Jesus, be the gift we ask for, and the gift we receive from the Lord, as we celebrate his holy birth.