



Christmas 2022

Homily

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**Sunday 25 December, 2022
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Quite early on in the ministry of Jesus, he was paid a visit by some of the followers of the famous prophet, John, known as the Baptist. These people had been sent to Jesus by John to ask Jesus if he was the one everyone had been waiting for or was there someone else who would come to take over from Jesus as an even greater man of God. Jesus did not answer directly. Instead, he told John's followers to go back to John and tell him what they had seen: that the blind see again, the lame now walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor. It is as if Jesus was saying to John and his followers, and therefore is now also saying to us, that words are not enough; their trustworthiness, their genuineness, will be known by what the words lead to - and in the case of the words of Jesus, they led to wholeness, healing, new sight and new life. It is precisely this that we celebrate tonight: that with the coming of Jesus into the world and into our lives a new hope and a new promise, all offered freely by God as a precious gift to every single one of us, have now appeared.

This gift, of course, comes to us in an extraordinary, and in a certain sense hidden, way. We have to go looking for it and we have to be ready to be surprised by where we might eventually find it. Tonight, we remember that the gift first came - that is, God first came to us - as a tiny, helpless baby, born into a poor and humble family, and in a set of circumstances which were far from ideal. Mary, heavily pregnant, and her husband, had been forced to leave the security of their home in order to comply with the orders of the unwanted Roman occupiers, and to travel to a distant town where they probably knew no-one and where they could not even find a decent place to stay.

They did have some visitors, but they were not the important local people of the town. Rather they were the shepherds who, though we may imagine them to be somewhat romantic figures, honest, hard-working, decent people, were in fact regarded by everyone else as little better than beggars and thieves. Yes, the shepherds heard angels singing, but apparently no-one else in Bethlehem did for no-one else came. Later in the story we are told that some wise men did come from the East with precious gifts, but they also brought a warning that the newly-born child's life was in danger and that the young family should pack up and leave - and so the family became, like so many people today, innocent victims of the political power games and jealous insecurity of those who were determined to cling to power at any cost. It all sounds so depressingly familiar as we look around the world today. The lust for power and control, whether it be by political or social



leaders, or in the hearts of each one of us in our relationships with each other, continues to bring misery and suffering to so many people.

Saint John's Gospel, which we will be proclaimed at tomorrow's Mass, speaks of this precious gift which God offers us in Christ in a very beautiful, and very explicit way.

"In the beginning," the Gospel says, "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God the Word was in the world that had its being through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God."

To all who did accept him: these simple words contain all the promise and all the challenge of Christmas.

As we gather tonight in the midst of the season of Christmas gift-giving, it is right that we, as Christians, should see in each gift we give and receive, a reflection of God's gift of himself to us in Jesus. Eager though we are to give gifts generously and sincerely to those we love, God's desire and determination to give us the gift of himself in his Son is infinitely greater than ours. Hopeful though we are that the gifts we give will be received with delight and gratitude and used well, God's desire that we receive his gift of himself in Christ with delight and gratitude and that this gift might enrich our lives as it is intended to do, is infinitely greater than ours.

Ultimately, God's gift of himself in Christ is the gift of freedom. It is the gift of new sight, which allows us to look at the world with the wide eyes of Christ rather than the narrow field of vision which so often holds us back. It is the gift of freedom from that paralysis of mind and heart which prevents us from walking confidently in the footsteps of our good Shepherd. It is the gift of healing from the leprosy, the disfigurement, which hides the beauty of the face of Christ which people should see shining in the welcoming and compassionate gaze they meet when they encounter us. It is the healing of that deafness of heart which prevents us from truly hearing the voice of God calling us to the richness of a life lived in fidelity to him, and in love and service of his people. It is, indeed, the gift of new life, which liberates us from the deadness of hard-heartedness and selfishness.

Tonight, we rejoice once again as we celebrate the coming of God among us. Tonight, with great gratitude, we acknowledge that the Word, from whom we and everything that exists has its being, has made his home with us. And tonight we are invited to say to him, *"Lord, so many of your own people do not accept you but tonight, here in this Cathedral, as we celebrate this Christmas Mass, we do accept you and we know that in doing so you are giving us the power to truly be the children of God and to truly live in you, and with you and for you"*.