

## *Tablet Article - December 25, 2005*

*Christmas, Year B*

### *Reverend Monsignor Richard E. Marchese*

Many times in hindsight we realize the significance of things we have experienced. When we look back we begin to gradually understand how God was gently guiding us through the people, events and circumstances of our lives. Imagine what it was like for Joseph and Mary at the birth of Jesus. The prelude to this marvelous event was characterized by a series of strange interventions and happenings—Gabriel’s words to Mary: “The power of the Most High will overshadow you,” the dream of Joseph with the angelic message, “she will bear a Son and you are to name him Jesus,” the movement of John the Baptizer within Elizabeth’s womb, “my baby leaped for joy,” and finally the heavenly host appearing to the shepherds, proclaiming to them ‘news of great joy’ and prodding them toward the child. Such is the work of God. Such is God’s Life in human affairs. Such is the convergence of the Holy Spirit, who moves and breathes where He wills.

What Mary and Joseph must have felt as they gazed upon their Child born under the breath of animals and the stars of the night! Yet in the midst of all this, through every apparition and dream, is the clear, firm message: “Do not be afraid!” It is so easy to be shaken by strange and powerful things we are unfamiliar with. But when it all comes from God there is a true sense of peace.

Wonderment and awe characterize the Nativity scene. As the Word made flesh leaped, as it were, from His heavenly throne, so did the human heart rise up from its lowliness to join with heavenly realities. We are reminded that He is Emmanuel—God with us. If we really believe this, then why would we want to be afraid? We should never be deterred from belief because of the humble guise of infinite power clothed in earthly flesh.

The warmth of the manger scene bids us to draw closer, but it also inspires us to go deeper into our inner selves, to discover the Christ who is continually being reborn through our thoughts, our words and our actions. In essence what is really happening is our identifying the scene we see with our eyes with what is continually taking place within ourselves. We were all born to be reborn, and that in itself is a source of wonderment and awe.

When the externals of Christmas are gone, when the glimmering lights are dimmed, when the tree and the decorations are taken down, when the presents are put away or discarded, when the great meals are long finished, what is left? We only ultimately retain what is within us. We are only enriched by what truly is of the Spirit of God. The rest is, in the end, superfluous and meaningless.

When we look at our daily lives, its constant busyness, all of our plans and projects and meetings—what does it really all mean, if it is not of the Spirit of God? If all our involvement with new structures and systems does not breathe with the Spirit of God and manifest the fruit of that Spirit in kindness and gentleness and compassion and humility, then what good is it all? It is like a human body without a soul—lifeless.

It is not an impossible task to rebuild the Kingdom—the Kingdom that the Preface of Christ the King reminds us is one “of truth and justice, of love and of peace.” But it is not only of our doing. In the final analysis it must be of God’s doing. We begin within. We learn how to listen to the voice of God and not just hear the noises of the world. We learn to search within. We learn to be docile, to continuously yield to the Spirit of God, our one true Teacher, to that same Spirit that dwells within the Church, in each of us. We learn like Mary and Joseph to accept things on God’s terms, not our own. We pray for the courage we need to rise above the everyday poor spirit that seeks to draw us down.

This Christmas let us pray to see realities that we never saw before, to realize the workings of God’s life woven into the fabric of our own lives. Christ is born and we must be reborn, but only through Him, with Him and in Him. Without our focus on that reality Christmas will only be for us the display of a manger without a divine presence, and hence only straw.