

Homily notes for Christmas Vigil and Midnight Mass December 24, v2016

Readings: Vigil – Is 62:1-5, Ps 89, Acts 13:16-17, 22-25, Mt 1:1-25

Readings: Midnight Mass – Is 9:1-6, Ps 96, Tit 2:11-14, Lk 2:1-14

Reflections based upon Pope Benedict's homily from Midnight Mass in St Peter's Basilica

1. Tonight “a great light” shines forth (Is 9:1); the light of Jesus’ birth shines all about us. How true and timely are the words of the prophet Isaiah which we have just heard: “You have brought abundant joy and great rejoicing” (9:2)! He prophesied this over six hundred years before Jesus! And yet it applies to us.

Reflections from the Readings

2. The readings from Isaiah show how God will restore us and bless us. Just as Israel was brought back to the Promised Land from Babylon, so, too, we can be freed from our desolation in sin to being restored in joy.

3. In the reading from Acts, St. Paul shows how **the entire history of Israel**, through the lineage of Jesse (David), **would culminate in the Messiah, Jesus**, who would save his people from their sins, through the repentance of their sins.

4. We are an historical faith. The Gospel reading from Matthew shows through the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph how the promises of God have been fulfilled through two thousand years of history. Our faith has been active and consistent throughout the entire modern history of the world. He further gives testimony for how Jesus is “God with us.”

5. The Gospel reading from Luke highlights **the role of Joseph and his obedience to the Word of God** as well as the prophecy that this Jesus is Christ and Lord. The two Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain the infancy narratives of Jesus. The Gospels of Mark and John do not.

How this affects us.

6. During Advent our hearts were already joyful in awaiting this moment. Now that joy abounds and overflows, for the promise has been at last fulfilled. Joy and gladness are a sure sign that the message contained in the mystery of this night is truly from God. There is no room for doubt; let us leave that to the skeptics who, by looking to reason alone, never find the truth. There is no room for the indifference which reigns in the hearts of those unable to love for fear of losing something. All sadness has been banished, for the Child Jesus brings true comfort to every heart.

7. Today, the Son of God is born, and everything changes. The Savior of the world comes to partake of our human nature; no longer are we alone and forsaken. God himself comes to be with us. The Virgin offers us her Son as the beginning of a new life.

8. The true light has come to illumine our lives so often beset by the darkness of sin. Today we once more discover who we are! Tonight we have been shown the way to reach the journey's end. Now must we put away all fear and dread, for the light shows us the path to Bethlehem. We must not be laggards; we are not permitted to stand idle. We must set out to see our Savior lying in a manger.

9. This is **the reason for our joy and gladness:** this Child has been “born to us”; he was “given to us”, as Isaiah proclaims (cf. 9:5). The people who for two thousand years has traversed all the pathways of the world in order to allow every man and woman to share in this joy is now given **the mission of making known “the Prince of peace” and becoming his effective servant in the midst of the nations.**

10. Listening to Jesus. So when we hear tell of the birth of Christ, let us be silent and let the Child speak. Let us take his words to heart in rapt contemplation of his face. If we take him in our arms and let ourselves be

embraced by him, he will bring us unending peace of heart. This Child teaches us what is truly essential in our lives.

11. The values Jesus embodies. He was born into the poverty of this world; there was no room in the inn for him and his family. He found shelter and support in a stable and was laid in a manger for animals. And yet, from this nothingness, the light of God's glory shines forth. From now on, the way of authentic liberation and perennial redemption is open to every man and woman who is simple of heart. This Child, whose face radiates the goodness, mercy and love of God the Father, trains us, his disciples, as Saint Paul says, "to reject godless ways" and the richness of the world, in order to live "temperately, justly and devoutly" (Tit 2:12). He shows us the good and the bad of how to live.

12. Pope Benedict is quite specific when he says that this example of Jesus calls us to a Godly life. "In a society so often intoxicated by consumerism and hedonism, wealth and extravagance, appearances and narcissism, this Child calls us to act soberly, in other words, in a way that is simple, balanced, and consistent, capable of seeing and doing what is essential." Let us reflect on his words.

What is consumerism? One who uses goods and services to satisfy his own desires rather than producing or helping others.

Opposite – charity to the poor, to be one who produces for others.

What is hedonism? The belief that pleasure is the ultimate good and should be the principal aim of action. Self-indulgence.

Opposite—to follow truth not pleasure. To be willing to deny oneself, take up one's cross and follow Jesus.

What are wealth and extravagance? Wealth is having much money or property. Extravagance is going beyond what would be reasonable or moderate limits.

Opposite – evangelical poverty and generosity

What are appearance and narcissism?

Narcissism is excessive interest in one's own appearance, comfort, importance, abilities, etc.

Opposite – substance and concern for the other

13. Benedict concludes, in a world which all too often is merciless to the sinner and lenient to the sin, we need to cultivate a strong sense of justice, to discern and to do God's will. Amid a culture of indifference which not infrequently turns ruthless, our style of life should instead be devout, filled with empathy, compassion and mercy, drawn daily from the wellspring of prayer. Like the shepherds of Bethlehem, may we too, with eyes full of amazement and wonder, gaze upon the Child Jesus, the Son of God. And in his presence may our hearts burst forth in prayer: "Show us, Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation" (Ps 85:8).

14. In a more simple suggestion, I encourage us to reflect on these values above that Pope Benedict saw to be so important. But more simply, in the imitation of God in giving us His Son, I encourage each of us to offer ourselves as "gift" to others. As we will be so eager to open our gifts on this Christmas, let us consider how to offer ourselves to others, especially our family, as "gift." Let us think what would be the best offering to our parents, to our children, to other family members, to others we encounter. Let us be preoccupied in love for others, in service to others, in order to fulfill the Spirit of Jesus in Christmas.

