

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

December 25 2018

Exodus 40:17-21, 34-38

Titus 3:4-7

John 1:1-18

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As St. John wrote, "the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not comprehend it."

The world did not know the Father's greatest gift.
It did not recognize the Father's greatest gift, nor want it.
Because it appeared too small, too weak, too humble.

To some, the humility of Jesus was offensive.
From His lowly birth in Bethlehem to the suffering He endured on the cross,
it all seemed like foolishness to most people—not the gift they expected,
not the glorious kind of salvation they were seeking.

Yet, to others, the humility of the One born of Mary,
the humble way in which He led His whole life,
from His lowly birth to His humble suffering and dying on the cross,
and the humble means by which He works faith—
makes Him accessible to lowly people, people like you and me.

It allows the worst sinner and the lowliest man, woman or child to see
that God came for them, too,
that God suffered for them, too,
that God is eager for them, too,
to repent and believe in Christ Jesus,
and receive the Father's greatest gift.

Let us rejoice in our Father's gift, giving Him thanks with our lips, lives, and our love—for Him, and for one another.

We continue now with our Exordium Hymn, Hymn 391...

Sitting...

Today is gift-opening day in the Church,
just as it has been or will be in most of your homes.

In the Church though, it's the same gift we open every year.

Actually, the same gift we open every week.

The same gift God gives to the world over and over and over again.

But as you know, Christmas marks the very first time

God gave this gift to the world;

a gift that is the perfect union of created and uncreated,
the perfect union of God and man.

When God first gave His gift to the world, we were His enemies.

We had sinned against Him, not He against us.

We had written Him out of our lives with no intention of apologizing,
with no means to make up for it,

no hope of reconciliation...even if we had wanted it.

Setting all that aside, God wrapped Himself in human flesh and was given
to the world, so that all who put their trust in Him might have

light instead of darkness,

life instead of death,

peace instead of punishment,

and joy instead of fear.

Friend, God's Word has come to you and converted you...

from dead to living, from sinner to saint,

from child of the devil to child of God.

This was given to you first at your baptism,

when the Word made flesh first covered you with Himself—

where the apostles describe you now and forevermore as being, "in Christ."

Since then God has been renewing this gift to you again and again in the Word of the Gospel.

And for the baptized child of God, He's given another special right,

a right not given to the rest of the world.

As we celebrate the Christmas mystery, the Word that was with God in the beginning,
the Word that was and remains God,

given to us in flesh and blood, gives His flesh and blood to you again...
 It's given from the humble manger of this humble altar,
 to you—and you only—and not to the world.

Here in this "Bethlehem," meaning "House of Bread,"
 the Bread of life is given to you,
 the very body knit together in the Virgin's womb and
 born in Bethlehem.

Here, too, is wine, the wine of celebration and
 feasting, and with this wine, the blood of Mary's Son,
 the Word who became flesh so that His blood
 might be shed for you.

Here He makes His dwelling among us again,
 not just in the room with us,
 but within our very bodies and souls,
 giving us His life... to sustain, comfort,
 strengthen and forgive.

Here today, the gift of the Word made flesh is given to you again,
 in a way you can actually receive Him.
 With your ears, eyes, mouths and your heart.

So open God's gift beloved.

Unwrap it. Turn it around and admire it from every possible angle.
 Doing so will take a lifetime.

For it is the gift of the Person of Jesus Christ, true God and true Man,
 with all His love, power and strength...
 with His victory over sin, death and hell.
 His light and life, His joy and peace.

All of this is yours. It's yours—!
 poured into your lap this morning.

And He'll do it again next week,
 and the week after that,
 and the week after that.
 Because...He is that good.

Merry Christmas.

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Standing...And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your
 hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.