

Merry Christmas to you all! You heard me right! Merry Christmas, not happy holidays, because as we all know very well, Christmas is the main reason for the season. If Mary had not given birth to Jesus, there would not be any Christmas. Big thanks again to my brother Knights of Columbus for always reminding us to "Keep Christ in Christmas." It is unfortunate Christmas has become a commercial or social feast, devoid of spiritual decorum. Folks, they can't suppress or stop Christmas celebrations. My brothers and sisters in Christ, Christmas is still considered the biggest celebration of all celebrations. Every year, more than billions of people throughout the world celebrate the nativity of Jesus Christ with church services, Christmas songs, exchange gifts, and enjoy Christmas dinner. It is truly a joyful festivity. I must also say even though Christmas is a joyful celebration, for some people, this Christmas may be their last Christmas they have with their loved ones or first one without their loved ones in attendance. Please know that you and your loved ones are in our thoughts and prayers. May God continue to grant them eternal rest and consolation to you all.

St. Luke gives us the account of the birth of Jesus. He tells us Joseph and Mary, the pregnant wife, have to travel from Galilee, a town in Nazareth, to the city of David called Bethlehem to take part in census Caesar Augustus has decreed. You will notice the historical context of the Gospel reading is a civil ordinance from the Emperor. Augustus, the emperor, was considered throughout the Roman empire as a 'savior' and 'god.' He was credited for establishing a period of peace (Pax Augustus) throughout the Roman world during his long reign. St. Luke relates the birth of Jesus to the time of Caesar Augustus to tell the early Christians and future Christians that the Real Savior and Peace Bearer, a descendant of King David, is Jesus Christ and not the Emperor Caesar Augustus or any human being. Jesus is the true Savior, not Emperor Augustus. Luke tells us Joseph and Mary did not get a room in the inn but in the manger. He was born a homeless child. Perhaps if the owner of the inn knew Mary and Joseph were going to give birth to a baby boy who would be the King of kings and the Savior of the world, I am sure he would have provided them with the best room he had. May we find Christ in every human being we may encounter.

Mary gave birth to their first-born son as the Gospel tells us. It does not mean that Mary had other sons. No please! It is a legal description indicating that Jesus had all the rights and privileges of the first-born son. (Gn 27; Ex 13:2 etc.) The angels announced the birth of Jesus, King of kings, to shepherds, the lower class of human society. Luke recorded this to remind us Jesus' birth is for all, but most especially for the lowly, the poor, the disadvantaged. The peace announced by the angels is more than absence of war. It also includes security and well-being as seen with peace in the Old Testament.

The prophecy of Isaiah, we hear in the first reading, talks about the advent of the Savior Child who will rescue his people from oppression and bring them freedom and peace. The early Christians reading this prophecy of Isaiah found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. For them, all the descriptions foretold by Isaiah were exactly what Jesus came to do and died for.

As we celebrate this Christmas, the first coming of Jesus, and await his final coming at the end of the world or during the hour of our death, let us listen and live the advice of St. Paul in the second reading. He reminds us to be aware of the grace of God that saves us all and to reject godless ways/worldly desires as we wait his final coming in glory.

Let me conclude my homily with these beautiful words of St. John Henry Newman, an English theologian, academic, philosopher, writer, historian, first as an Anglican priest and later as a Catholic priest and cardinal: "May each Christmas, as it comes, find us more and more like Him who at this time became a little child, for our sake; more simple minded, more humble, more affectionate, more resigned, more happy, more full of God."

Merry Christmas to you all and your loved ones.