

## HOM Christmas 2022

The greatest day in human history was nine months before the birth of Jesus, when God entered into irreversible, indissoluble, eternal nuptial oneness with Man. Our first reading (Christmas vigil Mass) makes reference to this where Isaiah utters this prophecy: *“As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you.”*

Nine months before Jesus was born, God was married to us – to our humanity – in the Blessed Virgin Mary – in whose womb – by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit -- the Son of God was conceived in the Flesh – united forever to our human nature – and so also became the Son of Man. The Nativity of the Lord – which we celebrate at Christmas – is the manifestation, then, of this marriage between God and Man.

It was a marriage always sought by God with His Beloved, whom He patiently courted in preparation for the big day. Mary was the fairest daughter of Israel – of the People God had chosen to be peculiarly His own -- and so she was given a singular favor that she might accept the Lord’s marriage proposal. She was immaculately conceived – filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit – from the first instant of her life.

All of humanity depended on Mary’s consent, which had to be deliberate, free, and without reservation. Without this, there would be no marriage between God and Man, ever! Mary’s answer was to be Man’s final answer to God. Her YES changed the course of human history toward Calvary – to the Cross of Obedience and Love -- and then to the eternal wedding celebration of Heaven where all the willing would live in nuptial oneness with the Son of God in the Father’s House.

Christmas, being the celebration of the birth of Jesus, and the making known of God’s marriage to Man in Jesus by the nuptial consent of Mary, also marks the beginning of each person’s response to the marriage proposal extended by God in His Son to every person. The Gospel writer John refers to this where he states that *“He (Jesus) came to what was His own, but His own people did not accept Him. But to those who did accept Him, He empowered to become children of God.”* In other words, those who did accept Jesus would be united to Him in such a way that they would share in His divine status as God’s Son. That’s another way of saying they would be married to God’s Son.

Now the beauty of all this is the way that God went about it, with His Son coming among us as a helpless baby. Think about it. Jesus, being God, could have come among us as an adult, without being conceived in Mary’s womb and being born in an animal shelter. Nor did He have to come as a descendant of King David as (the genealogy in Matthew’s Gospel account indicates), or as the descendant of Adam and Eve (as Luke’s genealogy makes clear). He simply could have created his own human flesh, a human nature exactly like ours but sinless, and just appeared one day, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, healing the sick, teaching the way of righteousness. But instead, by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, He came from Mary as a helpless newborn for perhaps at least two reasons.

First of all, as Son of God, He would not take on our humanity unless at least one person was willing to join Him in perfect obedience to the Father’s will, i.e., in perfect love for God and Man...unto the Cross. That’s what was needed for salvation after the sin of Adam and Eve. Imagine if He came among us as an adult – Son of God and Son of Man -- and nobody accepted Him when He told them about the Cross. He would have to return to the Father in the Flesh, empty-handed, without having saved anyone.

But Mary gave her consent to this. She was willing to conceive, and so, to give Flesh and birth to the Son of God – the Savior -- and to do the Father’s will in oneness with Him even unto the Cross, and she did! Thereafter, it was up to each person to decide whether or not to do the same, first of all, by accepting and

welcoming Jesus through Baptism and then by joining Him in His saving oblation to the Father's will unto the Cross through Holy Communion.

Christmas helps us to do this because it is all about accepting and welcoming Jesus first as a BABY like Mary did. In His love for us, it seems that God chose to come among us as a baby, not just because that required at least one person – Mary – to welcome Him, but also to help us do the same, and that means to welcome Him first as a baby. After all, who can resist a baby? I shared with you in my Christmas message in the Bulletin how my Mom used to walk up to mothers with babies and kiss the baby's hands, face, and feet saying "*I could eat you up.*"

Jesus came as a baby, it seems, so that all people would welcome Him, and maybe even, like my Mom, want to eat Him up in Holy Communion, and so join Him in His obedience to the Father's will and His love for all men and women unto the Cross of obedience and love.

Our Christmas decorations and celebrations reflect something of the glory to which this all leads. It is an expression of our sure and certain hope of what lay ahead in oneness with Jesus – a sharing in His divinity and eternal blessedness. The Christmas spirit of good will and selfless giving is all around and inside of people. It is the Spirit of Jesus who gave Himself to the Father and to us – to and from the Cross – spending Himself without reservation -- that we might join Him in His saving oblation.

But not everyone welcomes babies. The travelers in Bethlehem might have welcomed Joseph and Mary with her about-to-be-born-baby, if they themselves had not been so tired from their own journey. But that would have taken a lot of sacrifice – too much -- and they just were not up to it.

King Herod did not welcome Mary's baby either. On the contrary, he wanted to kill Jesus, and in an attempt to do so, slaughtered about 20 innocent infants in Bethlehem. He is the prototype of today's abortioners who seek to do away with babies who would disrupt their plans for a comfortable life or a brave new world without God. Even staunch defenders of the right to life of unborn babies, like the founder of Priests for Life, Fr. Frank Pavone, who stand in the way of abortioners, are somehow neutralized by the dark, pro-death powers and principalities that have sway even in the Church.

Yes, Christmas is about the birth of Baby Jesus, the Creator of the Universe, prince of peace, wonder-counselor, God-Hero, the Lamb of God whom the shepherds were invited to behold, the Logic of God Revealed to the Magi, and to all. Yet, many people do not accept Him.

There are now eight billion people on earth. Since 1900 until the year 2000 about one third of the world's population has self-identified as Christian. That would be 2.6 billion people today. However, the latest accounting shows that only 2.38 billion or slightly less than 30% now self-identify as Christian, so it does seem that, as a percentage of global population, Christianity is declining.

That's neither surprising nor alarming. Jesus said that the Father prunes the vine, which is Christ's Church, of lifeless branches, so that the remaining branches bear more fruit. But to bear more fruit – meaning to help more people get to Heaven by oneness with Jesus – requires that the faithful be conformed to Jesus by deliberately and freely offering themselves as voluntary victims unto the Cross with Jesus in order to communicate the abundant graces of the Holy Spirit to all the willing, that they, too, will join in Jesus' self-offering.

At the last Supper, when Jesus gave the New Commandment of Love to His apostles – that we are to LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS HE LOVES US – He told them there was no greater love than this – to lay down one's life for one's friends. Then he said to them: "I TELL YOU THIS SO THAT MY JOY MAY BE IN YOU AND YOUR JOY MAY BE COMPLETE." (John 15: 11-12)

From the Cross, Jesus also gave us His Mother to be our Mother, the Mother of the Church, His Mystical Body, to help us fulfill the new commandment of love, so that our joy can be complete. She thus helps us consent to God's love and His will as she did, and to receive Jesus into our bodies and hearts in Holy Communion. She nurtures us with the grace Jesus pours out to and through His Church by way of the sacraments, unites and engages us to her Son in Baptism, conforms us to Him through the other sacraments, perfects and consummates our oneness with Him in the Most Blessed Sacrament, teaches us to offer Him to the Father at Mass and to join in His oblation unto the Cross through Eucharistic Self-Offering. St. Joseph helps her with this, and us.

Brothers and sisters, I pray that your Christmas and New Year will be full of peace, love, and gladness – the kind of love that Jesus commanded of us so that our gladness – our joy -- would be complete and like His. If you want this, now and forever, I invite you to join me in praying these words silently and sincerely at every Holy Communion, striving to live them out in-between: **I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS, THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER, WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.** This is our consent to His marriage proposal. It renews, perfects, and consummates our nuptial oneness with Him that began with our Baptism.