**Christmas 2020 – TCSF**

**Our Salvation Comes in the Baby Jesus, the Word Made Flesh**

Every year, we come to celebrate this incredible moment in our world’s history. It is a day the truly changed our world, even the calendar reset because of this day. So what is the true reason for the season? What happened 2020 years ago? And is it just something in the past or are we celebrating something still happening now?

Jesus Christ, our savior was born. The God of the universe became one of us. *The Lord entered the Virgin and became a servant; the Word entered her, and became silent within her; thunder entered her and his voice was still… Rich he went in, he came out poor, the High One went into her and came out lowly* (On the Nativity of Christ, St. Ephrem). Incredible. Our God became one of us 2000 years ago, and thus called us from that day forth to celebrate our call to follow His way. In this sense, this day is not 2000 years ago, it is every day we live. The mystery of the Incarnation, the “yes” of the Virgin Mary, the birth of Jesus in a humble manger, this mystery awakens something deep within us that we celebrate today. The need of a savior. The thirst for living water. The hunger for living bread from heaven. In each one of us is a soul seeking answers, and in the infant Jesus, we get a glimpse that divine love that seeks us, and what God was willing to do to find us.

Around the world today, we, the people of the Church, disciples of Christ, continue to celebrate and teach our children traditions that make us remember this very fact that God has come to save us. Here in America, we put a Christmas tree, sing traditional Christmas carols, set up a nativity scene. In Ireland, people put a tall, thick candle on the sill of the largest window after sunset on Christmas Eve. That candle is left to burn all night symbolizing a welcome light for Mary and Joseph. In India, Midnight Mass is emphasized. The Churches are decorated, like ours, with poinsettia flowers and candles. But, unlike a traditional Christmas tree, a banana or mango tree is decorated. Those fruits are a little bit easier to eat than a pine cone. At midnight Mass in Mexico, festivities are interrupted by the ringing of bells calling families to *La Misa del Gallo* (The Mass of the Rooster). This tradition teaches that the only time that a rooster crowed at midnight was on the day Jesus was born.

All around the world, Christians celebrate the coming of their savior. Our savior. The savior. And this savior has called us to be one, universal family. And so we are. As Pope St. John XXIII said, *Mankind is a great, an immense family… This is proved by what we feel in our hearts at Christmas*. Christ came as the light in the darkness. There is never a perfect time in history, and there will never be a perfect time in the future. But where Christ dwells in our hearts – there will be peace. This is the mystery we celebrate today. Is peace possible on earth, in our communities, our families? Without religion, I am not sure that is possible, since religion is just our united belief in God. Our religion of Christianity is one that acknowledges suffering, pain, confusion, and fear, since these are the direct result of sin, brought forth by Satan who wants nothing more than for us to live without the God who made us. Many say the Church was born on the Cross, others at Pentecost when the Spirit breathed new life into the Apostles, but others go back to the occasion we celebrate today. The Church of this world took form 2020 years ago when Christ became visible and dwelt among us. With Christ as our foundation in our families and communities, there will be a chance at this peace.

The story of Jesus being born should always surprise us in new ways each year. The mystery of God’s coming to earth as a child has so many aspects to it – which is why we have so many traditions around the world! The story of Joseph, who as a husband to Mary but did not have her own child, sought to divorce Mary quietly – this was of course in another context within Jewish culture years ago. He was a righteous man. But he listened in his dream to the angel’s words and changed his decision to do the mysterious good God planned for Him. We have much to meditate on with Joseph – especially us fathers and husbands. Or we have Mary, who born poor, she was open to this troubling announcement from an angel that would also change her life completely. Yet she too said yes – this mystery is particularly powerful for mothers, wives and all women to contemplate. And then, to find no room at an inn for this Divine Child, the Prince of Peace, but they too humbled themselves as the crawled into a nearby cave. Material poverty was no match for the joy of holding the baby Jesus.

We see these mysteries come together today in so many places, but in particular in the Nativity Scene. Our faith is a mystery – the God of all ages became an infant, God raised up higher than the angels, the light came into the world and overcame the darkness. My brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ transformed this world and He comes once again to transform our hearts too. The problems of this world are many – but God has already given us the solution: our faith. Our Christian religion is the way we celebrate Christ’s birth, receive the fullness of His love through the sacraments by the hands of priests who dedicate their lives to Jesus like the early apostles, and a place where we become one, visible family. Different races, different incomes, different interests, different languages, we are all one when we all look down at the Child in the manger, or up at the Eucharist in the priest’s hands. This is the meaning of Christmas. By Jesus’s birth, he brins joy to all peoples with the promise of unending life, he gives us joy to all of us through the hope of heavenly birth, especially those we remember who have died this year or suffering today.

This is a day of great celebration, but also of great spiritual renewal. There is no replacement for our faith. There can be no substitution of the love that God has given us through his Incarnation, life and death, and invites us to love one another as the family that we are called into. The beauty of the Mass also reminds us of this: listening to the stories from scripture that bring us back to the days that this happened, smelling the incense that burns as an odor of love for Jesus, the representation of Christ’s love on the cross for us through the celebration of the Eucharist, receiving the One Bread, One Body of Christ which unites us as one family. Christmas is truly that, “Christ’s Mass”. Our faith, our religion, is not something only personal, God made us to gather, to celebrate, and to give thanks. When Jesus was born, angels to the shepherds and the Magi followed a star, and they all made haste to find the one that they have been waiting for. But the greater mystery is that Jesus made the first move, he was waiting for them.

Thank you, each one of you, for being at Mass – thank you for those joining online. Jesus calls us together today who would otherwise be strangers. And yet, when we are together bowing before Christ, we are all one. Bishop Fulton Sheen eloquently says, *how to find Christmas peace in a world of unrest? You cannot find peace on the outside but you can find peace on the inside, by letting God do to your soul what Mary let Him do to her body, namely, let Christ be formed in you*. As we all gather today to commemorate this glorious mystery, the salvation of mankind, we renew together our zeal to make our families, our communities, our traditions truly Christ focused. It begins here at the Mass, as Christians have gathered hundreds of years. May our celebration of Christ coming to earth be filled with joy, forgiveness, and generosity. And may the “yes” of Mary and Joseph in a difficult world be our yes as well. The light of the world has come today, make sure the world can hear our singing and see our joy, for while all different and wonderfully made, it is Our Creator who makes us one, holy, universal, apostolic family today. Peace to you and to your homes.