

Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, 2007
(A homily especially for children)

*“Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people;
for this day is born to you a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord.”*
(Luke 2. 10–11)

The birth of Jesus Christ is what we call a mystery—a truth that needs the help of God’s gift of Faith. Jesus, true God and true man, was born into this world that He made; and He was born in a stable. Why did He choose to be born in a stable? Because He did not belong to this world; from the moment He was born as a tiny babe, He was teaching us and all mankind that His Kingdom was not of this world.

Now the Angels did not decide for themselves to appear to the shepherds—It was the infant Christ who told them to appear to the shepherds and to give them those important good tidings which not only said that He was the Saviour, the Messiah that the people had been waiting for four thousand years; but that He was Christ (the anointed one) and the Lord, Who was the ruler of all creation. Through the gift of faith, the shepherds believed the message, and went to find Him and adore



Him. And Christ came into the world at midnight—which tells us that this was a new beginning for all mankind. At the same time, He sent a special star which the peoples of the East had been waiting for—and the wise men, or kings, set out to follow the Star until it stood over the place where Jesus lay. So that the whole world was made aware in some way that the new King was born. “As the Catholic Church sings at Christ's birth, the Almighty Word glided down in the midnight silence. The dreams passed into reality and were fined beyond expectation. The divine love graced human nature, and the divine love was mingled with it. A New Covenant was struck, and God satisfied the desire for happiness and truth by promising Himself as the reward for obedience to His revelation.”

What then of the joy that shall be to all the people? Now we know that Christ came to suffer and sacrifice Himself to save us from sin and the evil one whom we know as the devil. This great feast of Christmas is followed immediately by feasts of saints who suffered with Christ—what we call martyrs. St Stephen was the first of all

martyrs, and was stoned to death: and as he was dying, he prayed for those who killed him; asking God to forgive them. Then St John Apostle and Evangelist: perhaps you don't know that according to Tradition he was boiled in oil, but the power of God did not allow the oil to harm him; so we still look upon him as a martyr. He was exiled to the island of Patmos, where with great difficulty he continued his mission.

Then we come to the Holy Innocents. Herod feared the coming of the great King. His wise men had told him of the prophecy: that Christ would be born in Bethlehem of Juda—"And thou Bethlehem, the land of Juda art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the captain that shall rule my people Israel." So Herod ordered that all the children of two years of age and under, in Bethlehem and all the surrounding borders, should be slaughtered; children who could not speak, but who witnessed to Christ their Saviour by suffering and death. What does St Augustine say: "Never, in fact, could that impious tyrant have been able to benefit these children by the sweetest kindness as much as he has done by his hatred. For, as the feast reveals, in the measure with which malice in all its fury was poured out upon the holy children, did heaven's blessing stream down upon them."

Then followed the feast of St Thomas Beckett, Archbishop of Canterbury: victim of an angry king. Some Knights belonging to the court of Henry II overheard him speaking angrily—"Who will rid me of this troublesome priest!" They thought they would be rewarded if they did just that; they went to Canterbury Cathedral and killed the Archbishop as he was at the altar.

Why then so much suffering in the feasts that follow Christmas? To teach us that Christ came to sacrifice Himself for our sakes. It is through getting to know Jesus Christ from the time He was a baby – following every event in His life from the Bible history – that we get to know God better, and to know what God wants from us. We must remember that we all meet with many disappointments and sufferings during life on this earth – all our sufferings, no matter how small, help to make us holy, if we join them to the sufferings of Jesus in His life and on the Cross of Calvary – sufferings that bring happiness because they will make us more like Christ Himself and are the path to true holiness.

The prayer of the Holy Rosary is a wonderful way by which our Blessed Mother will show us the face of Christ—a face that will smile upon us in our sufferings; and a love that will welcome us at the end.