

St. John Gaulbert Cathedral
Christmas Day Mass - 2013
Homily

The famous detective Sherlock Holmes and his friend Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. They set up their tent and after it became dark they went to sleep.

Some hours later, Holmes woke up his faithful friend and said, "Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see."

Watson replied, "I see millions of stars."

"What does that tell you?" asked Holmes

Watson pondered for a minute and then he said:

- "Astronomically speaking, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets.
- Horologically, it appears to be approximately a quarter past three in the morning.
- Meteorologically, it tells us that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. "

Then after a pause, Dr. Watson said: "Well, Holmes, when you look up and see the stars what does it tell you?"

Those who have seen the old Sherlock Holmes mystery movies are familiar with an expression that Sherlock Holmes would often use in response to Watson's questions; so he said in reply,

"It's elementary my dear Watson, someone has stolen our tent!"

I thought of that story when I was reflecting on today's reading from the Gospel of St. John who says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

The expression "made his dwelling among us" in the original Greek language literally means "pitched his tent." It means that it was God's deliberate intention to live among us.

And it says in today's Gospel reading that Jesus came into the world this way because no one has ever seen God, so Jesus came to reveal God to us.

It says that through Jesus Christ our Lord, we are able to see God's glory which is all about grace and truth. St. John the Evangelist tells us that he personally experienced that glory. He was an eyewitness who saw God's grace and God's truth shared by Jesus Christ in his preaching and in his interaction with people.

The whole point of this mystery of the Incarnation through which the eternal Word of God became flesh and lived among us is so that all of us could come to know that God does not love us from a distance.

Just think of your relationships with friends and families. With Christmas cards, photographs, email, texting and telephone calls, we can remain in contact with them even if they live a long distance away.

But every human person desires the personal presence of people who are important to us. We want to look into their eyes and shake their hand or share a hug. That basic human desire is in lots of popular Christmas songs that use expressions like, "All I want for Christmas is you."

The same is true when it comes to our relationship with God. When Jesus was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit, he became the expression of God's love in person; in the flesh.

And for his birth the only thing that Jesus our Lord wanted was you and me. He was born into our world because he wanted to draw us into the love of God who is love and who is the source of our life.

Our celebration of Christmas each year is meant to remind us of this essential truth and grace about God's relationship with us. And we really do need that reminder.

Each year people try to draw our attention to this when they put up signs or send cards that say, "Jesus is the reason for the season."

But did you ever stop to think that from God's point of view, you and I are the reason for the season?

At the time of Christ's birth, God saw how mankind stumbled in the darkness of a pagan world with its glorification of materialism.

And even today, God sees how we are still tempted to walk aimlessly in life. Jesus came and continues to come in each of our lives to give us light, and meaning, and purpose and goodness, and beauty and truth.

Jesus Christ is the "Light from Light," as the Prologue to the Gospel of John calls him. The baby born that blessed night is the greatest of all gifts.

Jesus gave himself totally to us. We are the reason He suffered and died. He gave us a reason to live.

There is a story about an old priest whose Christmas homily was always the same. It consisted in only one sentence repeated over and over with different tones of voice and different words accented. All the priest said was, "The wood of the manger is the wood of the cross."

We keep Christmas alive when we live the sacrificial love of the One who was born for us and who died for us.

How many times have you ever said, "I need to make room for God in my life, or "I need to fit God into my life?" I know I have said it many times. It's something that we need to do; to make time and spend time with our Lord each day.

But we should remember that Jesus was not born on Christmas and did not die on Good Friday so we can fit Him into our lives. We are more important than that to God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The eternal Word of God came not so we can fit Him into our lives, but so we could fit into His Life. There is a huge difference.

God wants to fill the world with the wonders of His Presence. He does this through people who are united to Him. We have received the Life of Christ at our Baptism. We are called to make this life a reality in the world. We live to serve the Lord.

An outstanding example of someone who lived to serve the Lord and to help others fit into his life; a life of love, and grace, and truth, is Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. She insisted that this was what the Sisters of her religious order were to do because it's what Jesus taught all of us.

Mother Teresa told her Sisters it would not always be easy, but it is always necessary to live this way. She said:

- People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.
- If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.
- If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.
- If you are honest and sincere, people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.
- What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.
- If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.
- The good you do today will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.
- Even if you give the best you have, it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.

Mother Teresa used to say that in the end you and I are to live this way because in the end all that matters is our union with God. And hasn't our Holy Father Francis been telling us the same thing this year? He has said all of this and more in his recent letter called, "The Joy of the Gospel."

Christmas is a time for joy. And just as the first Christmas was a new beginning when Jesus Christ was born into our world, Christmas lives on in us in the many ways we allow him to be born into the hearts of others and for them to know that God wants them, as he wants us, to fit into his life.

When Sherlock Holmes and his friend Dr. Watson went camping and pitched their tent, Dr. Watson was filled with awe and wonder at the millions of stars in the sky. The great detective Sherlock Holmes was more concerned that someone stole their tent.

No one has stolen the tent that the only begotten Son of God pitched on the earth when Jesus Christ was born in a stable in Bethlehem. No one has stolen the tent, the chosen dwelling place of God, because he has chosen to dwell with us, among us, and within our very hearts.

God wants to be close and personal. He wants to be part of our life and most especially, the Lord Jesus wants us to be part of his life. That relationship is shared in a special way each time we celebrate this Holy Eucharist where we are blessed to be able to receive the Body and Blood of the Word made flesh. Give praise and thanks to God for that special gift!

At Christmas and always, may you know the joy, the love, the truth and the grace that God wishes to give you today and every day, his living and loving presence. If you really want to know it, then live it as much as you possibly can by sharing him with others, even if they don't appreciate or want such an awesome gift.

In the end, all that matters is that we pitch our tent, that we dwell in our world in the way of service and love that was shown by our Savior Jesus Christ.