

- Well...a very merry and blessed Christmas to all of you.
- I hope and pray that you are able to spend some good time with the family...renewing those Christmas traditions, and especially those family bonds so important in our day...with family members often scattered across the country and even around the world.
- If you can't be together, at least get in some good talking or Skype time with them. Especially for those in the military; I can tell you from experience that military men and women live to hear from family—especially on the holidays.
- [Liturgical note: kneel at the creed today.]

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- Oh, the beauties of the Christmas season...the lights, the tinsel, the presents under the tree...and the reason for it all: the greatest gift of all gifts—the world's salvation coming through a young girl, as she gives birth to her first-born son and lays him in a manger.
  - Not just any child (if there IS just “any” child!)...but one who is truly the Son of God...born of a virgin girl—something that would otherwise be impossible.
  - Not that this Son of God did not already exist...but, to that point in time, He existed only in Spirit...infinite, like the Father and the Holy Spirit of love between them.
  - But...nine months earlier...the Holy Spirit blessed the womb of Mary so that she conceived a Son—into whom was melded the completeness of the divinity of God—both God and Man...and not only for 33 years of Jesus' earthly life, but for eternity.
  - The 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Holy Trinity was not “confined” within that body. He gave up none of His divinity, but He also took upon Himself complete humanity: body, blood, soul...will and spirit.
  - He was completely God, and yet completely Man.
  - WE cannot understand this completely; the created cannot wholly understand the Creator.

- And how these two natures coexisted together we only speculate... like thinking of the edge of the universe: how can there not be an end, and yet, then, what is beyond it?

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- Why did Jesus (God) become Man and live among us?
  - In a nutshell the story goes:
    - God created Man in all goodness and gave Man instructions and rules to live by for His own good;
    - But although Man is totally dependent upon God, in arrogance He did not obey God...and because God is infinite, disobedience toward Him in justice deserves infinite punishment;
    - And yet God, in His love for Man, comes to us AS Man...and takes that punishment onto Himself in order to “wipe the slate clean”, so to speak...but only if we come back to Him, follow His commandments, and seek to live rightly according to His will.
    - If we do not, we turn away and refuse God’s great gift of mercy...and then strict justice awaits us.
  - When Jesus comes to us, He is showing us how much God loves us, and gives us the perfect example of how to live.
  - Perhaps then, He may have thought, they may turn back to Me...if I give them absolute proof of My love. If I teach them not through prophets, but come Myself and guide them...not only by My Word, but by My example.
  - Therefore, I will become one of them...and for a little while, become lower than the angels.
  - And to prove my love for them...I, as man, will give them all that a man is able to give: my very life. In that way they will know that, if I give all that Man can give...I will also give them all that God can rightly give.
  - But will they choose me? True love cannot force; it has to be freely desired, and freely given.

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- This is why Jesus comes to us today: to offer us this greatest of gifts: salvation; life with God for eternity.
  - And in the next 33 years He would live and grow...work and sweat, hunger and thirst and tire...and teach and guide...to finally complete His earthly mission on Good Friday on the cross...and on Easter Sunday with His resurrection.
  - And so...Behold, O Christian, God's tremendous love for you.

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- Tonight we rejoice in the baby born to the world...and for the world.
  - We as children dream about being heroes and saving the world.
  - In the manger 2000 years ago lay asleep the one who truly did so... who offered God's salvation and forgiveness to the world.
  - Jesus is born today for one purpose: that we might become saints, and share the divine life with God. But will we accept it?

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- So don't make this a token holiday visit to God, but realize the great gift offered to each of us...which we receive only by seeking to live truly according to the will of God.
  - Strong or weak...rich or poor...whatever race or nation...it matters not. All that matters to love of God and love of our fellow man.
  - Jesus tells us: *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* (Matt 5:16 RSV)
  - So let us together kneel together at manger's side...and adore the little one who is king of all...
  - ...for *"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion shall browse together...There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord as water covers the sea...and a little child shall guide them."* (cf. Isaiah 11:6-10)