

- 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.
- [Liturgical note: kneel at the creed today.]

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- Oh, how we love the beauties of the Christmas season...lights, tinsel, Christmas hymns, presents under the tree...but the reason for it all is the greatest gift of all gifts—the world’s salvation coming through a young woman, 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, which is—or rather, WHO is, the love between them.
 - But...nine months before tonight...the Holy Spirit blessed this young woman, Mary, so that she conceived a Son—into whom was melded the completeness of the divinity of God—the child conceived thereby being both God and Man...and not only for 33 years of Jesus’ earthly life, but for eternity.
 - The 2nd Person of the Holy Trinity also takes upon Himself complete humanity: body, blood, soul...will, soul and spirit...remaining completely God, and yet becoming also completely Man—a great mystery, and yet a great truth, which has awed His Church ever since.

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- Why did Jesus—God—become Man and live among us?

- Our Creed of faith tell us: *“For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate [enfleshed] of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”*
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- In the beginning, God created Man in goodness and gave Man guidance how to live...how to live and reflect the holiness of His Creator.
- But Man abused His gift of free will, and disobeyed...losing that holiness in which He was created.
- And yet, in His love for Man, God comes to us AS Man to help us restore that image of Himself within us...and to accept upon Himself the just punishment of our arrogance against our Creator and Father...to “wipe the slate clean”, so to speak.
- But we must come back to Him by believing in Him...born this night as a little child in a stable—God Himself in the tiniest of human packages...utterly defenseless, utterly dependent upon His human parents and guardians.
- And to believe in Christ—to love Him—is to follow Him...follow God’s will above all else...and to love our neighbor as ourselves. To cast aside grudges and to forgive...upon which our salvation is itself contingent.
- And when we follow Christ, St. Paul tells us: *“...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
(Romans 8:38-1)
- In the end, what else really matters?
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- When Jesus comes to us, He shows us how much God loves us, and gives us the perfect example of how to live. As St. John writes: *“God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the*

world, but that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:17 RSV)

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- We can imagine God thinking: “Perhaps, then, they may turn back to Me...if I give them absolute proof of My love. If I Myself come and guide them...not only by My Word, but by My example.
- Therefore, I will become one of them...and for a little while, lower myself even by this infinite degree from my exalted divinity to become dust, as they are dust.
- And to show how much I love them...I will give them all that a man is able to give: my very life.
- But will they choose me...that they may have eternal life? 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.
 - Tonight we rejoice in the baby born to the world...and for the world, to save the world...that we might become saints, and share divine life with God.
 - 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.
 - And let us kneel together at manger's side...and adore the little one who is king of all...and look to that day with anxious anticipation, when “*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)