

Homily: Second Sunday after the Nativity 2021

It's 3rd January, and already the world looks upon Christmas as a distant memory. For many people, the Christmas trees are down and decorations are put away, and normal life now resumes. The excitement of unwrapping presents on Christmas morning seems like a distant memory. But for the Church, things are very different. As Bishop Paul reminded us in his letter last weekend, the gift of Christmas is Christ, and He is a gift to be received every day of the year. And in a very real sense, in today's readings the Church is continuing to unwrap for us this greatest of gifts.

Today's Gospel is the Prologue of St John's Gospel. It's beautiful, powerful and poetic, but it's also very deep, and therefore harder for us to grasp than the simpler stories of the manger, the angels and the shepherds. And yet the story of the birth of Jesus is present here too. When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would have a child, it was clear that this child would not be conceived in the normal way, because He would not have an earthly father; His Father would be God Himself. And today St John speaks of "Him who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man, but of God Himself." Or we might think of the Holy Family frantically touring Bethlehem, looking for somewhere to stay and finding no room at the inn; today we hear that Jesus "came to His own domain, and His own people did not accept Him." Or we can remember the shepherds, who saw a host of angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will", before going and seeing the glory of the Child themselves. They could make their own some words we hear today: "He lived among us, and we saw His glory."

But today's Gospel delves more deeply into the truth of this miraculous birth, and tells us clearly who this Child really is. He is the Word of God, who was living in the beginning, before the world was created; He was with God, John tells us, and He was God. And it was through Him and for Him that the world was created: St John teaches that "not one thing had its being, but through Him." We will echo these words when we say the Creed in a few moments: Jesus is "God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through Him all things were made." And John's Prologue builds to a beautiful and astonishing climax: "The Word was made flesh". This Word of God, this Son of God who lived before the universe was created, came into the world that had been created through Him. And He became flesh: He took on our human nature, He shared our lives, our joys, our sorrows, our frailty. And to take on flesh means to become mortal: this Child will die for us too.

St John tells us that Jesus comes to us "full of grace and truth". He comes with these gifts of God: grace to help us live, grace to grant us salvation from sin and death; and the truth which He reveals to us – the real face of God, the full teaching of God which Jesus came to share. In Jesus, God saves us; in Jesus, God reveals Himself. As the Gospel tells us today, "it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart, who has made Him known." It's often said that actions speak louder than words. In Jesus, the Word of God is made incarnate; He does not simply speak, but acts. God no longer communicates with us only by words; He

speaks to us by the life-giving presence of His own Son. The God who speaks has become the God who shares our very life, and calls us to share His.

And this sharing also invites us into relationship. St Paul tells us in today's second reading that God chose us as His adopted sons and daughters; and the Gospel confirms this: "To all who did accept Him, He gave power to become children of God." How does He do this? By making Himself our brother. Jesus is the eternal Son of God; He came from heaven to earth to live as one of us, to share our nature – in other words, to become our brother in the human race. And if He is our brother, His Father becomes our Father: God is now our Father too, and through Jesus, we become His children.

To live as children of God, St John tells us, we really need only one thing: to believe in the name of the Word made flesh, and to accept Him. That would be an excellent new year's resolution: to believe more deeply in the name of Jesus; to put my trust more fully in Him, in His grace, in His truth; and to accept Him in every aspect of my life, so that I truly know Him as one who made Himself my brother, taking on my humanity so that it can be healed and saved. And the more I can do this, the more I will truly live as a child of God.

Fr Andrew

