

**HOMILY FOR CHRISTMAS MORNING MASS
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
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“Space, the final frontier...” These famous opening words are from *Star Trek*, my favorite TV show when I was in high school. In fact these words were inspired by a document produced in the White House in Washington, D.C. in 1958, which sought to calm people’s fears about what the Russians were up to in the space race and tried to get Americans excited about the idea of space exploration. The document said that the reason human beings want to go into space is the “thrust of curiosity that leads men to try to go where no one has gone before.”

The purpose of the words was the same both for the politicians and the TV writers. It was to make space travel sound exciting, daring and important. Viewers are not supposed to think of *Star Trek* as a just a sci-fi TV program – its opening makes it sound as if it’s an official report on intergalactic missions. The writers are telling us that this is important, serious stuff.

In some ways today's Gospel does the same thing. On Christmas Day perhaps you might expect to hear something like a traditional nativity story. Those accounts can be found in the Gospel passages read at Midnight Mass and the Mass at Dawn on Christmas Day. But John's Gospel has no donkey, no angels, no shepherds. It doesn't even have a baby. John assumes we know that story already. Instead we get taken back to before the dawn of time.

John uses soaring, majestic language to tell that the Christmas message begins with the "Word," with a capital W." John wants us to get our attention. He wants us to understand that this is a really important, serious matter, and John wants us to appreciate the full significance of it all.

John wrote his Gospel in Greek, and the Greek term he uses for the Word is *Logos*. It's the root of our word "logic" and of the stem "-ology" that we find in the words theology, sociology, geology and so on. It means word; but it also can mean knowledge, reason and meaning. So when John writes of the Word, *Logos*, he is writing about the reason for all things, the knowledge of everything and the meaning of life itself. And that meaning,

of course, is Jesus Christ, the tiny baby in the manger whose birth we celebrate today. Jesus is the Word come to earth in human form.

John takes our focus away from the baby of the Christmas story, not because that baby is not important but because that baby *is* so incredibly important. John's Gospel helps us to see the greatness of Christ's divine nature. And so we also see the enormous generosity of God's gift in sending Christ to live among us. It really is the most amazing Christmas gift we could wish for.

What should our response be? A gift should call forth gratitude and love. We come to Mass to give thanks to God in the Eucharist and to pledge our love in return for the presence of Love that we receive in Holy Communion. We come to be fed with the Bread of Life. We come to church to receive this nourishment not just on Christmas, but every Sunday.

If there are those in church today who haven't been here in a while, this is the time to return to the church community. If there are those here who have some doubts about all of this, this is the time to renew your faith. If there are those who have dark spots in their lives, this is the time for the light of Christ to cast out darkness and fear.

It makes no sense to come here today to make ourselves feel good and then abandon Our Lord the rest of the year. Christmas means nothing unless we change our ways and truly seek Him. Christ's birth means nothing to us if the light of Christ is not brought within the darkness of our souls to drive out the darkness of sin. As we recall the love of God that caused Jesus to be born into our world, we are challenged to make that love real. In the same way, when we celebrate at the table of the Lord, we make real the sacrificial love that led Jesus to the cross.

As we begin a new year one week from today, if you are looking for a New Year's resolution that will be a little more profound than going on a diet and losing weight, as important as that may be, I encourage you to resolve to go to Mass every Sunday, not just twice a year or once a month or when you feel like it. Resolve not to be like the rest of the world. Resolve instead to be like the Savior whose birth we celebrate today, but to be like Him you will need to receive Him into your heart frequently, at least every Sunday. This is the meaning of the Incarnation. God has taken on a human body and He gives this Body as the Sacrament of Unity and as Food for us in the Eucharist.

The great Saint Augustine centuries ago as a bishop in northern Africa called mankind to awake to the reality that God became man for our sake. He also told them in no uncertain terms what it would have meant if Christ had not been born:

“You would have suffered eternal death, had He not been born in time. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh. You would have suffered everlasting unhappiness, had it not been for this mercy. You would never have returned to life, if He had not shared your death. You would have been lost, if He had not hastened to your aid. You would have perished, had He not come.

“Let us then joyfully celebrate the coming of our salvation and redemption. Let us celebrate the festive day on which He who is the great and eternal day came from the great and endless day of eternity into our short day of time. . . . Let us then rejoice in this grace, so that our glorying may bear witness to our good conscience by which we glory, not in ourselves, but in the Lord.”¹

Let us thank God for this grace. Amen.

¹ St. Augustine, *Sermo 185, PL 38, 997-999*, quoted in the Office for Readings for December 24, *Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. IV (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 379-381.