



The Word was made flesh.

John 1:14 Christmas 2019

Dear friends,

As I sit to pen this letter, I can't help but notice how fast Christmas is approaching! The days between now and December 25th are getting fewer and fewer. It is a magical time of year, yet I find the rushing and busyness of the season tends to obscure the purpose of it. Do you ever find that to be the case? Now is the time when we are invited to take an opportunity and enter into the story of the Nativity. The Holy Spirit is working to nudge us,

to remember the excitement and anticipation at the heart of Christmas, as we look to the moment in creation where our God became flesh and dwelt among us. As we journey towards the manger to meet the newborn Christ child this Christmas Season, how can or should we prepare ourselves this year? My advice is, to let yourself enter into the mystery and wonder of Christmas. Turning our hearts to the joy of that holy night and taking in the beauty of Christ's birth.

Some of you may be thinking, easily said, but how do I do it? Fair question I should say. This Christmas, I invite you to meditate on this wonderful night, by immersing yourself in the story of the Christmas Carol, 'O Holy Night'. The Story of how this music came into prominence and rose to its current stature, reflects many of our own walks of life. Beginning in simplicity, being confronted by challenges and then watching as moments of grace and blessing flow into our lives as we allow them!

The story of, *O Holy Night*, begins in the 1840's in France, when a Parish Priest asked a local poet named Placide Cappeau to write a poem for the village Christmas Eve Service. Cappeau composed a poem while he was in a carriage on the road to Paris and he called it, '*Cantique de Noel.*'

Cappeau was so inspired by his Poem that he asked a well-known musician named Adolphe Charles Adams to compose a musical score for it. The song that we call 'O Holy Night' was performed just three weeks later on Christmas Eve. At a Midnight Mass in an obscure French Village, a choir celebrated Jesus' birth with these words:

*O holy night! The stars are brightly shining, It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining. Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.*

Placide Cappeau was an unlikely man to write these beautiful lyrics. He was a wine merchant who was known more for his Poetry than his Church attendance, and in later years he broke with the Church entirely to join the Socialists Movement in France. The Music Composer was also an unlikely man to write music for this poem. Adolphe Adams was of Jewish ancestry. He composed this music to celebrate a Holiday he didn't observe and a Messiah he didn't believe had returned.

When the Church Leaders in France learned these facts, they officially banned the song as "unfit for church services." But it was too late, *O Holy Night* had already become one of the most beloved Christmas carols in France. No matter what the Church Leaders decreed, the French people kept singing it. You see, even though the composers may not have believed what they wrote, they had produced a masterpiece that was true to the Gospel message.

Years later, the carol itself would be seen as a sort of Miracle. On Christmas Eve in 1906, a 33-year-old University Professor named Reginald Fessenden did something most of the world thought was impossible. Using a new type of Generator, this Professor (who had worked earlier with Thomas Edison) – spoke into a microphone and for the first time in history, a human voice was broadcast over the airwaves.

Shocked radio operators in ships and wireless operators at newspaper offices jumped up in amazement. They were used to hearing coded “bleeps” over tiny telegraph speakers, but suddenly, they heard a clear, deep voice speaking these words,

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed ... And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem." Luke 2:1,4

Professor Fessenden went on to read the entire chapter from the Gospel of Luke. He probably had no idea that he was causing an uproar. All over the area, women and men were rushing to wireless units to hear what many thought was a Christmas miracle. Some even believed they were hearing the voice of an Angel!

When the Professor finished reading, he picked up his Violin and played a beautiful Christmas melody. And on that Christmas Eve in 1906, ‘O Holy Night’ became the first song ever sent through the air by radio waves. From that Holy Night on, people all around the world would have a new way of listening to music.

When Jesus was born, the compassion of God most truly broke into the world. It broke in then, as it often does now, through unexpected ways and unexpected people. Ever since that mysterious and wonderous night, the Light of Christ has continued to break into the world’s darkness and illuminate it with the power of God’s divine love. Christmas celebrates this amazing act and reminds us that God’s transforming Grace is something we have the opportunity to be part of every day. The Cistercian monk Thomas Merton emphasizes this in his writings, as he points out that God continues to bless the world with Christ’s love through humanity. Merton says; “Christ is born in us today, in order that he may appear to the whole world through us.” Because of Christmas we are now the carriers of God’s love. Our hearts are now Christ’s Bethlehem. Although Jesus was physically born over two thousand years ago, he is spiritually birthed every time a loving act is generated by the creator and lived through us in some way.

The birthing of Christ in us and through us happens every day, but we focus on it more particularly as we celebrate Christmas. Whatever we do, be it participating in joy-filled Eucharistic liturgies, being gathered with loved ones for special food and the opening of presents, or simply enjoying games and seasonal entertainment, it is always through love and the giving of ourselves, that Christ enters our world. Christ is born in us through our: unselfish kindness, gracious help, generous patience, understanding acceptance, compassionate care, and many other ordinary loving gestures.

As you continue your journey to the manger this Christmas, may you feel the wonder and joy of this Holy Night washing over you. May this Holy Night reach out and shine Christ’s light of love and grace into the lives of those you hold in your heart. And, may we always trust that as we work for God’s good purposes in our lives, that our journeys will be full of His presence and riches.

To one and all, to you and yours, God Bless and Merry Christmas!

Fr. Matthew †

Please join us Christmas Eve as you are able at our 4pm Family Service or our Candlelight Services at 7pm or 11pm.