



Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord 25 December 2023

Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“O Come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord”

(From the Hymn O Come, All Ye Faithful)

This Christmas I look forward to celebrating the Midnight Mass (at 8pm) in St George and St Teresa, Dorridge. I will always remember my first Christmas there as Parish Priest in 2001: it was my first experience of the Christmas Tableau performed by Primary School children at the first Mass on Christmas Eve at 5:30pm. Having spent some 20 years in the Diocesan Catechetical Centre at Maryvale, this was my first experience of “real” Parish Life, my own Parish at that: I had seen rehearsals going on over the weeks leading up to Christmas, but here was the real experience. A Church packed to the rafters; people everywhere: parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters of the cast, and regular parishioners. I was very moved by it; children taking the parts of key players at the first Christmas brought tears to my eyes: Mary, Joseph, the Child Jesus, Angels, Shepherds, the Wise Men. The Hymns, songs, the joy was palpable; the Tableau brought to life the wonder and awe of the scene at Bethlehem over 2000 years ago when as the Hymn says:

*“Oh love shone down
Over the hills and over the valleys,
Oh and Love shone down over the world”*

“Eight hundred years ago this Christmas, in Greccio, St Francis of Assisi recreated the scene of Our Lord’s birth” the Pope noted at his General Audience on 20th December. This was a living recreation with live people, the animals, hay and straw. Francis wanted to stir peoples’ hearts, and they came from all over. Francis said: “I want to depict the Child born in Bethlehem, and in some way see with the eyes of the body the hardships in which he found Himself for want of the things necessary for an infant: how He was laid in a manger and how He lay in the straw between the ox and the ass.” The Pope said: “Francis doesn’t desire to create a beautiful work of art, but through the Nativity scene, to provoke amazement at the extreme humility of the Lord, at the hardships he suffered, for love of us, in the poor grotto of Bethlehem.”

The lovely tradition of setting up a Christmas Crib in our families and in our Schools and Churches reminds us of the true meaning of Christ’s Nativity: the closeness of our God, who came among us in poverty to enrich us with the gift of his saving love.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



In St George and St Teresa we will begin Midnight Mass with the Church in semi darkness – singing ‘Silent Night’ as the Choir and Servers make their way in procession with lighted candles to the Crib and I, as Celebrant, will carry the figure of the Christ Child to place in the Manger. The Crib surrounded with candles alight will then be Blessed. At the end of the Mass we will sing “O Come, All Ye Faithful” as families make their way to the Crib to pray in “amazement”: “O Come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord”. I use the word “amazement” because Pope Francis so rightly said on Wednesday this week:

“If Christians look at the Crib as a beautiful thing, as something historical, even religious, and pray, this is not enough: Before the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, before the birth of Jesus, we need this religious attitude of amazement. If I, in the face of the mysteries do not come to this amazement, my faith is simply superficial Dear brothers and sister, the Nativity scene is like a small well from which to draw the nearness of God, the source of hope and joy. The Nativity scene is like a living Gospel, a domestic Gospel. Like the well in the Bible, it is the place of encounter where we bring to Jesus the expectations and worries of life, just as the Shepherds of Bethlehem and the people of Greccio did. Bringing to Jesus the expectations and worries of life. If, before the Nativity scene, we entrust to Jesus all we hold dear, we too will experience “great joy” (Mt 2:10), a joy that comes precisely from contemplation, from the spirit of amazement with which I go to contemplate these mysteries.” The Holy Father concluded his address, which I hand on to you, *“Let us go before the Nativity scene. Look everyone, and allow your heart to feel something within.”*

May your Christmas be truly Blessed. May your hearts rejoice as the glory of the Lord shines round you, as it did on the Shepherds that night: *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour.”*

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