

# DECEMBER 25, 2022: NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST



John 3:16-17 contains such a beautiful sentiment, and it is really at the heart of why we celebrate Christmas: “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” God created us in love, maintains us in love, and saved us through his love. But, this word ‘love’ that we use so often and so easily is in many ways misunderstood. How we define this word is essential to how we understand our relationship with God.

We first need to recognize an essential truth about the love that John speaks of: “In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.” True love is grounded first and foremost in the love that God has for us. The only way we can begin to love others is to be open to the love God has for us, and then we are able to love others through that love. It is impossible to love another person apart from the love that we have for God. And our love for God does not begin with us, but with the love that God shares with us. Ultimately, we must discover the truth that love is not a feeling, but an act of the will. God demonstrates his love by creating, maintaining, and saving us: that is love itself. Love is not something you prove; it is not something you simply demonstrate; instead, it is a way of life. God is love for the simple reason that all He does is an expression of his very being. He seeks what is best for the other and what will lead the other to experience true love. And true love is based *not* on feelings, but on action—how we choose to live our life. Paul teaches that to us in First Corinthians:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” So often this passage is treated as a beautiful sentiment and not really something that one can achieve. The truth is that Paul is not speaking about an ideal but, rather, gives us a description of a love that we are intended to live out each and every day of our lives—a love that is, of course, other-centered. True love is not about what you expect to receive in return. In fact, if you love someone and expect a return, that is not true love; that is a transactional relationship. The very existence of the other should be the only reason we love them; this is true love. God loves us simply because we exist and *not* in spite of our sins. Paul reminds us of this truth through his description of true love.

This is the reason Jesus tells us that we must *not* simply love those who love us. We must love our enemies—those who curse us. Love has no boundaries. It has no limits. It is freely given, and it does not count the cost. That is why Paul tells us that love is patient. And this patience is not about the small annoyances that someone may create for us. It is about being patient with them as a person. It is about being patient as they discover and discern the person God created them to be. It is about showing the same patience that God shows us through others. Love does not seek its own interests, as we see in the parable of the Good Samaritan, or the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son as most powerfully demonstrated by Christ on the cross. We must simply ask the question, what is best for the other? And that is what God did when He sent Jesus to us on Christmas day.

We must never forget the fullest meaning of Christmas, which is discovered *not* at the Creche but at the Cross. The Incarnation (Jesus having two natures, fully human and fully divine in his one person) and Jesus’ birth make possible the Paschal Mystery (Jesus’ passion/death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven). What happens at Christmas and what happens at Easter are tied together. They both, ultimately, express God’s love for us. Jesus was born to die. Jesus was sent so that He could show us the depth of his Father’s love for us. If Jesus did not come to us and accept the cross, heaven would have been permanently closed to us. And we must never forget why God made us: “God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him forever in the next.” (Baltimore Catechism)

The greatest gift, then, that we can give to God is to simply love others as He loves them. We must love unconditionally each person who enters into our life. We must be willing to lay down our life for their needs. We must live a life that is truly other-centered, but grounded on a life centered in Christ.

May you come to truly know the love that God has for you. And may you experience that love through the love you share with others, and they share with you.

Merry Christmas!

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at [fr.brian@theholyrood.org](mailto:fr.brian@theholyrood.org) , or if easier please call or text me at (978) 254-0560.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian".

Fr. Brian