



Homily for 12/24/21

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

Christmas

At the end of every year, we crown it with the glory of Christmas. Once again, we are mystically transported to a little town in Israel, to a time that marks the beginning of our current reckoning of time. In the year of our Lord, a Savior was born to us. All the rest of time is measured from this moment. We are present to this mystery in a representation of the scene of a holy, but humble, family, experiencing the most common of human experiences, birth. We've all been there, even if you don't remember your own. But this birth is different. It is the birth of the one who existed before time. It is the birth of the one through whom time and all else was created. It is the paradox of the Creator being begotten of a creature. Here, the God of heaven made His home on earth.

O Magnum Mysterium. O, what a great mystery! There is a beautiful antiphon to this effect that has been set to music over the centuries in the sacred music tradition of the Church. "O great mystery, and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the newborn Lord, lying in a manger! Blessed is the virgin whose womb was worthy to bear the Lord, Jesus Christ. Alleluia." It was sung as one of our preludes before Mass. You may have heard it with rapt attention. You may have missed it, distracted by other things. It may have escaped your notice, gone under the radar, been just a backdrop or a thing briefly acknowledged but quickly forgotten. And yet, this is exactly what the Birth of Christ is, *O Magnum Mysterium!* The Birth of God escaped the notice of many in His day. The celebration of His Birth went 'under the radar' – though the star that announced his birth brought the Magi and the scrutiny of a jealous pseudo-king. But especially in this year of our Lord 2021, the birth of the world's Savior is increasingly underplayed, and this season reverts to pagan roots of saturnalia, and worship of natural rhythms, undoing the baptism of nature by the blood of the virgin womb when God became man. To most these days, this *magnum mysterium* that built Cathedrals and made saints forms just a nice backdrop to 'holidays' without much depth of meaning or recognition, forgetting the etymological root of holiness in the use of the politically correct phraseology of our day. This is the day of great mystery that makes us holy – not just another excuse for revelry. The great mystery is quickly forgotten, tossed out with all the all-too-readily-discarded Christmas trees that will litter the curbs of our city in a few short days. More and more, the faith that saves us finds itself homeless and without acknowledgement, like a tiny flicker of light. But it is also a great mystery to which some attend with rapt attention as we do tonight. God can take this smoldering ember of faith and fan it yet into a consuming fire of love for the world. You have come in to the household of God because you have been invited by that spark, however small it may have been. Whether it was an invitation expressly made or one that was the product of inherited wisdom – we all have come to acknowledge that this is a holy night. This is a night divine, and we must go to where God is found to adore Him. In many ways God speaks to us. God knows the hearts of men. He knows because He made His home amongst us.

If you have found yourself here by chance or intuition, be at peace, for you have found your home. If you have dabbled in His presence once or twice a year, I make an invitation to come back and immerse yourself in God's loving gaze as a weekly dose of homecoming. The Lord desires you to visit more often because He wants to dote upon you and embrace you in His love. If you are a regular and a household denizen, the elder brother of the parable of the prodigal, now is the time to prepare a rich banquet of invitation to the beloved. You know what you are to do as you go and come from this home of faith: make your outreach known with invitation.

Invite all to the House of Christmas. And so I will close with a beautiful summation of the great mystery given by G.K. Chesterton in the form of a poem with this same name.

THE HOUSE OF CHRISTMAS

G.K. Chesterton

There fared a mother driven forth
Out of an inn to roam;
In the place where she was homeless



All men are at home.

The crazy stable close at hand,
With shaking timber and shifting sand,
Grew a stronger thing to abide and stand
Than the square stones of Rome.

For men are homesick in their homes,
And strangers under the sun,
And they lay their heads in a foreign land
Whenever the day is done.

Here we have battle and blazing eyes,
And chance and honor and high surprise,
But our homes are under miraculous skies
Where the yule tale was begun.

A Child in a foul stable,
Where the beasts feed and foam,
Only where He was homeless
Are you and I at home;

We have hands that fashion and heads that know,
But our hearts we lost – how long ago!
In a place no chart nor ship can show
Under the sky's dome.

This world is wild as an old wives' tale,
And strange the plain things are,
The earth is enough and the air is enough
For our wonder and our war;

But our rest is as far as the fire-drake swings
And our peace is put in impossible things
Where clashed and thundered unthinkable wings
Round an incredible star.

To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.

To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.

Merry Christmas!
May Jesus Christ be Praised!