

My Christmas homilies are kind of like a box of chocolates: you never know what you are going to get. I don't even know half the time which, at least for me, adds to the adventure of the season. Adventure. Regular parishioners here know that my approach to Advent this year was as a journey or an adventure and I tried to give us guides to help us along our way. All good adventure stories have periods of preparation and moments of intense action which should be followed by a calmer period of rest, recovery, and reflection. Advent was a season for us to prepare for our encounter with Jesus by going out and clearing the path of all obstacles that get between us and him. That journey should have been a little dark and scary if we did it right. Now, like Mary and Joseph, we have completed the first stage of our journey and we have come to a place where we can rest before beginning stage two.

Christmas is a season, not a day. Please do not go home and take down your Christmas lights, throw out your tree and stop listening to Christmas carols; Christmas doesn't end until January 12 in the modern calendar. Traditionally the season didn't end until February 2nd with the presentation of Jesus in the temple. We are given this extended period of time to stop and rest and reflect on our experiences so far. The most important experience is our encounter with the child lying in the manger: Jesus. We need this time to fully appreciate the mystery of the incarnation which in simple terms is God becoming man so that he can experience the fullness of our humanity—except for falling into sin—and redeeming it through his death on the cross. Does the crucifixion reference make you uncomfortable? Sorry, but the cross was always present in Jesus' life, even at his birth and before his birth. The cross is a sacrifice; what else can we call the creator of all things allowing himself to be born in a stable which is a home for animals. Even the names of the specific locations where the baby laid his little head speaks of sacrifice. In Hebrew the name Bethlehem means house of bread, something we eat. Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes and laid him a manger, the place where animals eat. The word "manger" comes from the Latin word "mandere" and the French word "mangier" both of which mean to chew or to eat. This is eucharistic language and already foreshadows Jesus giving us his flesh and blood to eat in Holy Communion which itself is a bloodless re-presentation of the events on calvary.

That is a lot of heavy stuff to think about and it is why we need a season—not a day—in which to begin to comprehend it. Take advantage of this time to rest from our Advent adventures and rejoice in the birth of our Lord. We need that rest because stage two of our journey will begin before we know it and

that stage is the perilous journey through Lent and Holy Week towards the glories of Easter.

Finally, remember this one thing. Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus, God who became man to save us from our sins and is always with us. However, were Christ to be born in a thousand stables, it would be of no avail, if He were not also born in our hearts. May Jesus find rooms in all of our hearts this Christmas.