

Dec. 25 (Christmas Day)

Isa.52:7-10

Heb.1:1-12

Jn.1:1-14

Let us pray: Almighty God, you wonderfully created and yet more wonderfully restored our human nature. May we share the divine life of your Son Jesus Christ, who humbled himself to share our humanity, and now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Merry Christmas! For many of us, Christmas celebration feels like the most significant celebration in the year. We have Christmas meals with family, loved ones and friends. We prepare, give out and receive Christmas gifts. My husband John, after having skipped cooking Christmas turkey for years, especially after his stroke four years ago, will be cooking turkey today after Church for our family dinner tonight.

Yes, we love celebrating Christmas - after all, it's a celebration of God's intense desire to be with us even by sharing our humanity, and that grows into our being restored to resurrected life in Christ. And it's a celebration for all irrespective of age or race: the birth story of baby Jesus is one that children can relate well to celebrate God's closeness to them; while the much more in-depth theology on Christ's incarnation intrigues and keeps adults contemplating on this demolition of wall between the divine and human.

And in the midst of all these embraces and celebration, we gradually find St. Luke's birth narrative of baby Jesus (with angel's annunciation to the shepherds etc.) intermingled so well with St. John's prolog in his Gospel (on Jesus' incarnation and work through creation and redemption) as well as the Hebrew Scriptures, that we can see a seamless fabric revealing us such divine mystery as they hold hands with each other.

Well, how do I mean by saying this? Last night during our Christmas Eve liturgy at the candlelight Eucharist, we sang 'Silent Night, Holy Night' while we contemplated on the birth of Jesus with angel announcing that good news of Salvation to the shepherds in the field. In particular, we contemplated on the shepherds' response as such contemplation may shape our possible contemporary response.

Then, as we come into church again this morning, once again we heard from our First Reading on bringing of good news to announce peace and salvation, except this time the messenger to the people of God is human, rather than angel to the shepherds in the field. There, again the messenger and sentinels together sang for

joy for God's return to Zion, for the redemption of Jerusalem, bringing restoration and comfort to the people of God. Doesn't this Old Testament prophesy echo well the joyous announcement by the angel to the poor flock-watching shepherds in the field upon the birth of Jesus as per the Gospel Reading we heard last night?

Sometimes our minds got bolt down by the somewhat archaic terminologies such as 'salvation' or 'redemption', albeit they form the centrality of the Christmas good news. Yet like the faithful shepherds in the field hearing the angel's annunciation of the birth of Jesus as our Savior, we choose to look for and seek to verify the good news as our response. And by opting to take such route, we open ourselves to inherit the blessing of Christmas, not only of hope, peace, joy and love, but all the more to enter into the Holy Mystery of oneness with the Son of God, once incarnated and now be with us whenever we have a place for him in our hearts. And so we gain a deeper insight of the Holy Mystery of Christmas, such as those revealed through our Second Reading and Gospel Reading today. And then we find the birth narrative of the Holy Infant born in a manger brings us a lot of 'aha' moments. Let's take a brief look again at some such extracts from our readings for today:

'Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son . . . He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being . . .'. Yes, we may find it mind-boggling that even baby Jesus spoke so powerfully to the shepherds and to us – it opens our inner eyes to see God's aptitude of great love, deep wisdom and relentless benefaction for us all got imprinted in Christ's sharing our humanity as a helpless baby born in a manger in the company of animals as part of the creation which was created through him, reflecting God's glory in humility, and in his solidarity with human especially the poor and the helpless. This is all the more so as we, unlike the shepherds then, know about how this Holy Babe grew into Christ our Savior - 'when he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs'. That's right, the shepherds then were shocked upon seeing and hearing angel's annunciation and heavenly hosts' praises to God, in the background of God's glory shining around them. Yet that's just the beginning as highlighted by the Christmas birth. For we all have now been equipped to seek much more beyond that, and hence can echo what we heard today from the Book of Hebrews: 'in the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end.' And so as

we celebrate Christmas, we are not merely celebrating God's great gifts for all since 2,000 years ago, we are also celebrating our onward journey with Christ, as well as our eternal hope with the Second Coming of Christ.

Having taken such broader survey of Christmas, we inevitably appreciate how St. John chose to elucidate Christmas not as a historic highlight but as a manifestation of Jesus' person and work. There, St. John started by alluding to Christ's presence and identity with God from the beginning (thereby highlighting Christ's work in creation, especially in emphasizing 'what has come into being in Christ was life, and the life was the light of all people'). With that, St. John introduces Jesus' birth as 'the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it' . . . 'the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world' . . . 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth').

Having said that, St. John knew, like the author of the Book of Hebrews in our Second Reading today, the highlighting of Christmas cannot be complete until we see the entire picture of Jesus' person and work (of creation, salvation and redemption). And so we also heard from the Gospel Reading: 'He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.'

It's like having turkey for Christmas dinner is just a prelude or an interlude for our ongoing tasting and seeing the goodness of daily meal as provision from on high, till we move on from God's Alpha story towards Omega story, seeing Christ face to face when he comes again to complete the work of creation which got started from time immemorial, and the work of restoration which got started from that first Christmas when the Holy Babe was born in Bethlehem in a manger.

Let us pray again:            Almighty God, you wonderfully created and yet more wonderfully restored our human nature. May we share the divine life of your Son Jesus Christ, who humbled himself to share our humanity, and now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.