

Christmas Eve 2023
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney

Titus 2.11-15 St. Luke 2.1-14



...FOR GOD HAS REVEALED HIS GRACE FOR THE SALVATION OF ALL MANKIND.

Tonight's Epistle reading is from Paul's Letter to Titus. Titus was an early Christian missionary and one of Paul's closest friends. According to tradition, Titus became the first bishop of the Island of Crete.

Paul commences his letter by talking about grace. The grace he is talking about is God's special gift to us...not because we earned it or deserved it...but because he wants us to have it. God's grace helps us understand Christmas is more than elaborately decorated trees, Internet shopping and presents. Those are all good things...we just need to keep them in their proper perspective.

Paul goes on to say we wait in hope for the Blessed Day God will reveal himself to us through his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was born with one mission...to fulfill God's will...to give himself for us...to rescue us from all wickedness...to make us a holy people who belong to him alone and are eager to do good.

The birth of Jesus is the story of the *INCARNATION*...literally "taking on flesh". God comes to us tonight...a real human baby boy born in a stable...with animals for his companions...not the kind of place we would expect our God and King to be born in. Jesus is *EMMANUEL*...*GOD WITH US*. Jesus the baby boy learned to walk among us so one day we might walk with him in heaven...forever.

We began tonight's Liturgy with a hymn of joy and praise. We then blessed our beautiful Crèche, decorated with the figures of the Blessed Mother. Our patron, Saint Joseph, stands quietly in the background lost in his own thoughts at

the miracle he was witnessing. The shepherds and animals surround the Baby Jesus.

Soon the secularized and commercialized world will be busy putting away Christmas trees and decorations and having after-Christmas sales.

The Crèche is our visual and highly instructive recreation of the Nativity. It teaches us Christmas has just begun. We continue to celebrate Our Savior's birth and sing Christmas carols until January 6...the Feast of the Epiphany...the "Twelfth Day of Christmas".

We hear the Christmas story told at the conclusion of every Sunday Mass and we will hear it tonight...the first fourteen verses of John's Gospel called the *Prologue*...meaning *Beginning Words*. Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *American Prayer Book Commentary*, calls it the most "concise New Testament statement of the fact and meaning of the Incarnation". Its message is loud and clear.

We can't keep Christmas to ourselves. We live in an increasingly out of order and disordered world desperate to hear the Good News about Jesus and the hope and peace that comes from knowing him. We must share that hope and peace with everyone who is willing to hear.

Before we leave here tonight, let's spend a few minutes at the Crèche in quiet prayer and meditation on the real meaning of Christmas. God has given us the most perfect Christmas present in himself.

Tonight we join with the Angels and Saints everywhere and shout...

*...GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST HEAVEN,
AND PEACE ON EARTH TO THOSE WITH
WHOM HE IS PLEASED!*

Our long wait is over. Jesus our God and King is here. O come let us adore him.

