

Christmas      2008              4:00              Midnight

("Happy holidays! Merry Christmas!")

He was born 100 generations ago in an obscure village in an occupied country, conceived it was thought, out of wedlock. He worked in construction until he was 30, then became a traveling preacher.

He never held office. He never had a family, or owned a house. He didn't go to college, didn't write a book, didn't many money. He never traveled more than 120 miles from his home. He had no connections, no credentials but himself. He was abandoned by his friends and executed as a common criminal.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the kings who ever ruled, have not affected the life of people on earth as much as *That One Solitary Life*

And why? Could it be that he is still alive, still in the world? Could it be that He is divine? Could it be that He is God? [pause] Could it be that He is here right now, with us?

Welcome, everyone who gathers at St. Bernadette to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. God took human flesh. Isn't that amazing? A woman gave birth to the divine. Heaven crawled the earth, babbled, soiled a diaper, learned to talk and think and pray--one of us. In the middle of the night, on what was thought to be the shortest day of the year, Christ--the Light of the World--was born.

Jesus was probably born in a cave, and there are many near Bethlehem. We are told that there was no welcome at the inn--no *kataluma*--the Greek word. The truth is that if you are important enough, there is always *kataluma*--hospitality. Jesus was lower class.

And so this baby God is placed in a manger, a feed box for the animals. Later he would feed thousands with a few loaves and fishes. Three days before he died for us, Jesus found *kataluma*--hospitality--at another inn. At that inn, on Holy Thursday night, he fed the twelve. Even now, he feeds a starving world with his Body and Blood.

And who were the first visitors honored to gaze upon the newborn Christ? Kings, rabbis, the powerful? Well, animals first, then shepherds. Shepherds didn't attend synagogue, didn't obey the Jewish ritual laws. Mangy, stinky, ritually unclean--the shepherds encourage all of us who fail, who fall short religiously. There is hope for us all!

We are told that St. Francis of Assisi fashioned the first Nativity Scene, and that he would gaze at it for hours, tears of joy streaming down his cheeks as he reflected on God's great love for humanity. But we are not here to admire statues or stables, or even the Baby. We are here to meet Christ, who loves us, who gave his life for us. Jesus Christ, who is among us this afternoon in his Body and Blood, in his Word, and in one another--in you and me. *You can't find Jesus until you stop looking everywhere else.* May he find "kataluma," hospitality, welcome in each of our lives.