



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"ChristMess."**
Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

Old Testament Isaiah 9:2-4,6-7
Epistle Titus 2:11-14
Gospel Luke 2:1-14

It may come as a surprise to some to hear that I have actually attended a birth. No, there isn't a secret family somewhere that I haven't told you about. I am as single as I ever have been. But part of our seminary training involved a lengthy stint in a hospital where we were expected to learn all about what goes on there. I overslept my autopsy, but I was present for a hysterectomy and the birth of a child. Indeed I was. The father was busy attending to matters at his wife's head. I was instructed to observe from the other end. So I am quite aware that coming into the world is a very messy affair, with screams and groans and blood and water and fluids- nothing like the movies or TV, and incidentally, not much like the Christmas carols either. The ancient Christian legends say that Mary's delivery was effortless, and we all know that "the little Lord Jesus no crying he made." That, as I say, is legend. But I somehow suspect that the Birth of Christ was a bit more like the one I saw at Methodist Memorial in Peoria. And I think that's a good thing.

Why?

Because the point of this magical evening is not mythology, or legend, or even nostalgia, but something we call Incarnation: God becoming a human being. Not, I

hasten to point out, “appearing” as a human being: that is indeed the stuff of mythology. No, this was much more complicated, and with a much greater investment. It was the stuff of blood and water and fluids- of a dangerous childhood and a troubled adolescence and the whole list of “first’s” that parents are so fond of recording. In short: a life like many others in its complete and messy humanity.

It is possible to celebrate Christmas as some kind of midwinter festival, or even to attend this service to observe quaint tribal customs from yesteryear. It is possible, but you will have to work at it. That’s because I and some of my friends are here to celebrate a birth, a life, and indeed a death that brought the world a bit closer to its maker, and that has touched and changed our lives so totally that no other kind of Christmas rites will do than one that draws from all of the centuries and all of the cultures that the Christian Church has affected and enthused. No apologies for that, by the way. It’s the way this family celebrates: singing old songs, dressing in solemn vestments, enacting the significance of the day not with punch and fruit cake but with bread and wine that are for us “messy” things like flesh and blood. Messy, human, intimate, us.

Christianity is not for the squeamish or the faint of heart and neither is Christmas if you do it well. Because ultimately, when the presents are unwrapped and the food is eaten and the guests have gone home, we are left with our humanity in all of its disappointment and all of its wonderful potential. And that is when Christmas- the real Christmas- can kick in to remind you that God’s love isn’t just a thing of nursery rhymes and carols, but of flesh and blood and water and fluid and a real birth and a real death. But the most wonderful thing about that is that God doesn’t leave it at that, but takes it, and uses it, and gives it back to us as something beautiful, something important and something that will last.

May the birth we celebrate remind you that earth and heaven meet in humanity tonight. And it’s a messy and a wonderful thing.