

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Coming Of Our God

For many reasons an onlooker might think that Christmas represents the heart of the Christian religion. It's the only feast we Westerners celebrate in a really noticeable way. We can talk all we like about Easter being the true heart of our mysteries; but Christmas seems to preserve its cachet of the Real Thing, the absolute feast.

Is That Wrong?

It would be a wonderful thing if we, as a parish, and as a wider Church within our society and its culture, could so ginger up our celebration of Easter that people would realise its primacy over all other days. How wonderful if *next Easter* we could pack St Hugh's for the Paschal Vigil, and show the world our faith in the Resurrection, instead of treating the whole miracle as a piece of routine! While we wait for that sea-change in our parish, however, we can work with the idea that Christmas is celebrating the true heart of the business.

The Meaning Of The Midnight Mass

We celebrate Christmas with the Mass of Midnight: at the darkest time - of the year and of the day - we release an explosion of life and joy which is elixir. In the very depths of this annual death-time, life springs forth from the womb of darkness; and it is a life that has no kinship with the darkness it illuminates. That unconscious freshness which shines from a baby finds here its eternal zenith: here, for us, is born a Son, and something eternally new has changed our world right to its horizons. Still, the way we celebrate it is with the Eucharist, in which we meet, not Baby Jesus, but the risen Lord. And we meet the risen Lord only on condition that he receive our flesh, our body, and live his life in it as we do, so that at last he can hold out to us hands like ours that are pierced with the wounds of death, but wondrously alive.

Born To Die

The life that begins in the midnight mystery will die in the unnatural darkness of Calvary. But the body itself, which lay in the manger,

and brought the shepherds to their knees, is what is taken up into the glory of the Father. This physical fact is the turning-point, the fulcrum of human history, the hinge that opens the door of life to us. Because in this little form, crying from the trauma of birth, sleeping from the onslaught of time, blinking in the uncertainty of his unaligned eyes, in this child God takes his first breath of human life. How will the mystery of this life ever be spoken out? Few of us find the eloquence to express our true self. But how will God tell us of his presence in our midst, lapped in the frailty of a baby new-born? How he will work, and struggle, to say what he means! How often we shall turn away, foxed and helpless, as we struggle to understand him! Because he is not here to tell us a theory, or explain to us a lesson, or to give us rules. He is here *to be God in human terms*, and that is unspeakable, unthinkable, impossible to say or understand. Our punishment of him, as we begin to hear what he claims, will be swift and pitiless. Then we shall see ourselves as we are, and go home not, like shepherds, glorifying God, but beating our breasts.

But He Is All Here!

One of first feverish things parents do to their new baby is, embarrassingly, to count all his bits. But who will number the members of Christ's Body? Then it is not long before new parents begin to dream, trying to fathom the measure of the life they have brought into the world. But who could have held in one mind the future for this little one? We shall never draw any bounds to the life he lives with the Father in eternity. Still, we know that he belongs to us, more than our own enslaved life does; that he is God's gift to us, the royal Son who brings with him the inheritance of all things. Mary held him in her arms, and with great love fed the needs of the one who is Bread of Life for the world. When we love another, we're astonished that so much power could issue from one simple human being. So much more now: all the world's love is due for this tiny Child, whose coming sets free

our long-imprisoned hearts.
Philip

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