

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## In The Order Of The Spirit

The reason why human life is so beautiful is that the Spirit of God plays about the human form, and gilds it with divine beauty. This is life in the order of the Spirit. The reason why human life is so awful is that we have the option of *excluding* this divine grace with a totality that renders us mortally damaged, and taints every impulse of ours with the influence of the grave. This is life in the unredeemed order of flesh.

### A Christmas Gift

It isn't that the flesh is something evil. *Nothing God makes can be, of itself, evil.* But the flesh is designed to receive the Spirit, and without the Spirit it makes no sense, has no future, and can deliver none of its promises. How many Christmas gifts will be delivered and accepted in the next few days? All of them will be offered in hope of giving joy, and carrying good-will and generosity. But they won't succeed in doing that because of their earthly value; they will accomplish the good they do in the order of the Spirit, whose gifts of faith, hope, and love give earthly gifts eternal value. How many parties will be held, hoping to experience closeness and warmth and hospitality! If they are good parties, it will not be because of the abundance, or even the excellence, of the food or drink. Beautiful food turns to ashes in bad company or bad grace. What matters most for any human life is to build the strong foundations in the order of the Spirit, which God has made possible for us by the coming of Christ. He is the hidden factor which seals the value of our Christmas presents and parties, his the truth which binds us to each other in a love which is no longer a sad attempt to huddle together for warmth, but a sacramental sowing of eternal harvests, a new act of divine power within the Creation.

### Matthew's Story

We are now well into the first year of the Lectionary - the year of Matthew; and thus we hear this week the story he tells of the time before Jesus' birth. He tells us that Joseph was "a man of honour", and thus proposed to cancel his marriage to Mary quietly, now that she is expecting a child he knows is not his. Here is a deed which is "honourable" according to the flesh. The whole story reeks of the fallibility of the flesh: Think it out loud: *Joseph suspects unfaithfulness and promiscuity in Mary.* We should voice those things clearly, so that we can see what the Spirit can do to change the experience of a human life. Then comes the moment of divine grace: *the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream....* the ancient vocabulary of a divine visitation. Here is that unexpected moment of unearthly beauty, where a

human life is suddenly turned to face the light, and finds its earthly values transfigured with the grace of God. *When Joseph awoke, he did what the angel of the Lord had told him, and took his wife to his home.* From now on, we can see, this little family is no longer "according to the flesh": its very continuance, and the oncoming birth, are to be understood *in the order of the Spirit*, in which Joseph has transcended his own intentions as "a man of honour", and started to act in that mysterious and grace-filled way which belongs to those who have heard the word of God.

### He Will Save His People From Their Sins

When we hail Jesus as "the saviour" we are saying that he has the power to raise us into that same gracious frame of reference, which sets a new stage for our living: "no longer for ourselves," as the Eucharistic Prayer says, "but for him". It is the nature of Jesus to live a human life totally "in the order of the Spirit", where the forces of evil find no foothold. Despite this utter sanctity, Jesus is willing to accept all that belongs to sinful human life: suffering, loneliness, poverty, hatred, punishment, condemnation, death on the Cross, and the grave; all of these are realities which belong to the flesh unredeemed. Jesus displays his freedom to accept them innocently, in solidarity with the unredeemed, and in every moment of his earthly existence, there shines from him the clear light of God's glory. This is the divine fulness which rings in the poetry of Christmas. May he be our Light, as we come looking for joy in this Christmas season!  
*Fr Philip*