

CHRISTMAS 2025 – Nativity of the Lord

[Isaiah 52.7-10; Hebrews 1.1-6; **Luke 2:1-16**]

Excerpts from Pope Francis Christmas Eve Homily 2022

by Father Charles Fillion

Two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, we know many things about Christmas; but there is a danger that we forget its **real** meaning. To rediscover the meaning of Christmas, we go to the Gospel of Jesus' birth as it appears to have been written precisely for this purpose. The Gospel speaks of a great census but it quickly shifts our eyes to something else, which it considers more important. It is a small and apparently insignificant detail but nonetheless mentions three times. First, Mary places Jesus "in a manger" (*Lk 2:7*); then the angels tell the shepherds about "a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (v. 12); and finally, the shepherds, who find "the child lying in the manger" (v. 16).

To rediscover the meaning of Christmas, we need to look to the manger. The manger is important because it is **the** sign, of Christ's coming into this world. It is how he announces his coming. It is the way God is born in history. The manger serves as a feeding trough. It can symbolize one aspect of our humanity: our greed for consumption. While animals feed in their stalls, men and women in our world, in their hunger for wealth and power, consume even their neighbours, their brothers and sisters. How many wars have we seen! And in how many places, even today, are human dignity and freedom treated with contempt! As always, the principal victims of this human greed are the weak and the vulnerable.

This Christmas too, as in the case of Jesus, a world voracious for money, hungry for power and pleasure does not make room for the little ones, for so many unborn, poor and forgotten children. I think above all the children devoured by war, poverty and injustice. Yet those **are** the very places to which Jesus comes, a child in the manger of rejection and refusal. In him, the Child of Bethlehem, every child is present. And we ourselves are invited to view life, politics and history through the eyes of children. In the manger of rejection and discomfort, God makes himself present. There, in that manger, Christ is born, and there we discover his closeness to us. He comes there, to a feeding trough, in order to become our food. He comes to touch our hearts and to tell us that love alone is the power that changes the course of history. He does not remain distant and mighty, but draws near to us in **humility**; leaving his throne in heaven, he lets himself be laid in a manger.

Brother and sister, God is drawing near to you, because you are important to him. The **Christmas** manger, the first message of the divine Child, tells us that God is with us, he loves us and he seeks us. God was born in a manger so that you could be reborn in the very place where you thought you had hit rock bottom. The manger of Bethlehem speaks to us not only of closeness, but also of *poverty*. Around the manger there is very little: hay and straw, a few animals, little **else**.

The manger reminds us that he was surrounded by nothing but love: Mary, Joseph and the shepherds; all poor people, united by affection and amazement. The poverty of the manger shows us where the true riches in life are to be found: not in money and power, but in relationships and persons. And the first person, the greatest wealth, is Jesus himself. We are to visit him where he is to be found, namely in the poor manglers of our world. For that is where he is present. Without the poor, we can celebrate Christmas, but **not** the birth of Jesus.

We now come to our last point: the manger speaks to us of *concreteness*. Indeed, a child lying in a manger reminds us that God truly became flesh. From the manger to the cross, his love for us was always tangible, concrete. From birth to death, the carpenter's son embraced the roughness of the wood, the harshness of our existence. He did not love us only in words; he loved us with utter seriousness! He who was born in the manger, demands a concrete faith. Tenderly wrapped in swaddling clothes by Mary, he wants us to be clothed in love. God does not want appearances but concreteness.

Brothers and sisters, **may we not let** this Christmas pass without **doing** something good. Since it is **his** celebration, **his** birthday, let us give him the gifts he finds pleasing! At Christmas, God is concrete: in his name let us help a little hope to be born anew in those who feel hopeless! Jesus, we see you as *close*, ever at our side! We see you as *poor*, to teach us that true wealth resides in persons, and above all in the poor: forgive us, **if** we have failed to acknowledge and serve you in them. We see you as *concrete*, because your love for us is tangible. Jesus, help us to give flesh and life to our faith. Amen.