

“A Spark of Love”

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Today, the First Sunday after Christmas and is another day of celebration. It is now the Season of Epiphany and today in particular remembers Jesus’ Baptism, We are gathered around the marvellous and unforgettable account of Jesus’ birth. At Bethlehem the Virgin Mary brought her child into the world in a stable because Joseph could not find lodging anywhere else. Isaiah said how it would be: *A child is born to us, a Son is given to us.* But He is not just an ordinary child: *They named Him, Wonderful, Counsellor, Rabbi, Teacher, Prince of Peace.* He is such a special child that He merits such titles. We know who He is because we have been preparing for His coming during the weeks of Advent. He is both God and Human man.

We have heard many sermons about Christmas and sometimes we feel we know ahead of time everything that could possibly be said about this season of celebration. Its real meaning seems to have reached deep down in us before anyone tries to explain it to us anew. What we feel we should do is to be silent together, to look into the manger and let the scene speak for itself. Perhaps it would not be amiss for one person to express the simple thoughts aroused in them as they gaze upon the crude crib.

First, one feels a sense of purification and simplification. There is no burning desire to make long speeches about the problems of the day or the complicated situations of our contemporary world. We do not feel obligated to refashion the world and reconstruct the universe according to some new mystique. The scene before us is too important and too intimate to allow for pompous discourse or idle chatter. Some will say that the world begins a new era with the celebration of Christmas. Some will go on to say that from here-on in everything will change. Some will declare that from today on there will be universal peace and all people will be reconciled in a joy that will be shared by all. But the majority will say that this is an illusion. We must accept the fact it will not be so until the end of history, the end of the age, until all humanity has effected an inner conversion and resurrection into the luminous purity of the risen Christ. Until then there will always be problems within our individual selves and the world of humanity as well. We see military might, mutual exploitation, a quest for revenge, and individuals trying to gain domination over others. Jesus’ birth in a stable near Bethlehem will not change our present day living conditions. The hope it offers us is not that sort. Jesus refuses to play the role of magician for us, making things simple for us as if we were incapable of organizing our life on this earth or making it more satisfactory in terms of day to day living.

The message we read each year at this time, the events of this season are more intimate and subtle. They go deeper. Jesus was born into a world of baseness, rivalry, hatred and suffering. He did not go out fighting as a reformer with a political programme. Instead He shows us that we are capable of loving amid all that, perhaps even because of all of that. He also suggests that every human being should stand in contemplation before His crib in order to receive the personal message that is addressed to us by God the Father and Creator of us all.

This is the heart of the message for these days of celebration. Each of us is capable of loving and being loved. Whatever the circumstances, love is capable of growing and triumphing over all challenges. This child who is given to us is, *God forever revealed.* By

His presence He tells us that a new élan of love has risen up in the heart of every person. It is safeguarded from the start and we can put our trust in it.

The Gospel gives us a sign: *This day in David's City a Saviour has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord. Let this be a sign to you: In a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes.* This message about a newborn child suddenly becomes highly innovative, pointing toward a new, fragile, and yet triumphant love. Every newborn is very fragile. It depends 100% on those around it. It would soon disappear from life completely if others did not care for it. The new spark of love that is lit during the Christmas Season is in the heart of every person and is equally fragile. Many people will ignore it or pervert it unwittingly. Some trial or emotion or scandal will squelch it. Or else the hustle and bustle of noisy activity will cause people to waste their energy in foolish ways. Instead of being strengthened, the spark of love will be undermined. Because of its frailty a newborn baby is truly demanding. It has many needs and it will suffer badly if it does not get constant attention. The new spark of love within us must also be nurtured and treasured continually. This does not mean we must guard it puritanically. It means that we must be clear eyed and attentive. If it is not nurtured continually, then this spark of love will gradually dim until it is snuffed out by our unconsciousness.

We will say that it is not our fault that we simply do not believe any longer. But the fact is that the loss will be due to our own negligence. But even though a newborn is fragile and in constant need of attention, it is always engaging. It gives us an inner thrill, forcing its presence upon us and awakening in us feelings of tenderness and respect. The new spark of love lit in us demands our affection and respect, forcing us to prefer it over everything else. No other passion or personal interest should infringe upon it or extinguish it. It is the important thing in our life.

Finally, a newborn baby always strikes us as a compact microcosm of life itself. It is tiny, but what reserves of energy and vitality it has! Rich in promise, it will grow up into a human being capable of meeting and responding in its turn. The tiny spark of love in us has equally great potential. It is the thing that makes saints and works miracles. It is the thing that makes the Church the living presence of Jesus in the world, destined to proclaim the Gospel to every creature over the course of centuries. As modest and insignificant as a newborn baby, this inner spark of love can enkindle and transform the world if all of us believe enough so surrender to it.

The celebration and remembrance of Christmas and our contemplation of the newborn child in the stable, leads us down into the very core of our being. It is at the very heart of the self that the new world so earnestly sought by all, is being fashioned. It is there that each individual will encounter their Lord.

Christmas marks the birth of Christ the Lord and He continues to invite all of us to born anew. To do this we must get ourselves together. We must go down into the depths of self in silence and peaceful meditation. Then we will be able to nurture the spark of love that has been given to us so we may know that we are loved and capable of loving. One of my favourite hymns usually reserved for Easter maybe should be sung as a testimony to the why of Christmas, *O dearly, dearly has He loved, and we must love Him too!*

It is not a dream or an utopian vision. It is simply what the Lord asks of us and it is the reason for His coming. He will give each of us everything we need to succeed. In turn, we must be open to His presence and refuse Him nothing. We need to be prepared to give Him the totality of what is our very best.

May the spark of His love be in you today and always. Amen.