

**Christmas 2017**

***“And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us.”***

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.  
Amen.**

**For some 18 years I have stood in the pulpit on Christmas and, like most priests, attempted to find words that could convey how special this morning is. We spend a little over an hour here and then return to our regular routines often failing to realize just what this feast commemorates. What I’ve learned is that there is little I can say to improve upon the wonder of the Word Made Flesh as foretold by the Prophets and told by the Evangelists. Thus, today I will elaborate a bit on the facts of the greatest story ever told. God’s eternal plan for world redemption was a perfectly synchronized program of events that centered on the Savior’s Birth in Bethlehem. When we examine the details we are overwhelmed with the fact that it was not an afterthought with God. It was a carefully laid organized plan of complexity. St. Paul tells the Galatians, “When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem**

those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons of Grace.”

It took place just at the right moment, precisely as God had prearranged it. It was communicated through His spokesman to those who would be obedient to His Word. The Prophet Micah had declared 700 years before the coming of the Messiah that He would be born in Bethlehem, Judah, in the ancient city of David.

Fast forward 700 years and you have an average couple, descendants of King David, living in Nazareth, a few days journey from Bethlehem. Mary is due to give birth any day now, and going to Bethlehem was likely not in her plans. But as we know, in order for the Scriptures to be fulfilled, that is exactly what needed to happen.

So how do they end up in Bethlehem? Well, not by choice. Caesar Augustus orders a census, and a pretty big one at that. We're told that "all the world should be taxed." For Caesar, it was all about power, and especially, money, that is, taxes.

If you recall Caesar Augustus was ruler of the Roman Empire from 27 B.C. -A.D. 14. His background is well-recorded. Born Gaius Octavius, we know him as Octavian. His father was related to

**Pompey and Julius Caesar is his grand uncle who adopts him and makes him heir to the throne.**

**Oddly enough, Caesar was never aware of his greatest and most lasting achievement, that is, preparing the way for the Savior of the world.**

**As each person had to travel to his own city to register, Joseph heads to the city of Bethlehem because he was of the house and family of David.**

**Although very pregnant at the time, Mary makes the journey with Joseph, which was no easy task. It was 63 miles if you took the shortcut through Samaria, which, no pious Jew would, do, or 90 miles if they go the “regular” route. Now bear in mind, Mary was likely on foot. We often see images of her riding on a donkey, but there is no scriptural evidence of this.**

**Luke is careful to tell us that Mary was engaged to Joseph and was with child.**

**Engagement in first century Jewish society was taken quite seriously. From the moment of engagement, the woman was treated as if actually married and the relationship could only be dissolved by a writ of divorce. Unfaithfulness was considered**

**adultery. The couple did not consummate the marriage until the wedding celebration and the man took her to his home. Both Mary and Joseph make this very clear in their testimonies in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.**

**Although there was much that Mary did not understand, she knew that nine months earlier, the Angel Gabriel had come to her with the news of this miraculous conception. Like any mere mortal, Mary wants answers. "How can this be? After all, I've never been with a man."**

**Well, she gets her answer: The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; thus, the offspring shall be called the Son of God."**

**The miraculous element was in the manner of the begetting or conception of Christ in Mary. Clearly, the literal message is that Jesus was to be born of Mary without a human father. As a very special person, Jesus would have a very special entry into the world. Think about it:**

**The Virgin Birth provided a sin free nature; a human, but also a Divine nature. In that body, the God-man came to redeem us from sin.**

**As had been prophesied, while in Bethlehem, Jesus is Born. Luke tells us that she “brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger.”**

**These “swaddling clothes” consisted of a square piece of cloth with a long, bandage-like strip coming off from one corner. At the time, it was thought that the strips of cloth would protect a baby’s fragile limbs, strengthen his back, and provide proper growth for his bones.**

**The wrapping of our Lord Jesus in such a manner also reminds us of the preparation and wrapping of Jesus for His burial after His death on the cross.**

**As our story continues, Luke tells us that Jesus had to be laid in a manger, or feeding trough as the inn was full. But bear in mind, this wasn’t the “Holiday” Inn. Inns in those days were not some place you would take your family on vacation. They were basically, overcrowded, overnight caravan stopovers; an enclosure for the traveler to drive his cattle for the night. Some did have apartments, but there was no food and no host. The only thing the innkeeper provided was hay for the animals and a fire for warmth. Aside from**

**the manger, we're not sure what the surroundings consisted of for the Holy Family. But we do know that God provided for their needs. The first to hear "officially" of the Birth of Jesus were simple shepherds; outcasts at the time and certainly the last people anyone would expect to be approached by an angel. But as Mentioned in yesterday's homily, with God, always expect the unexpected.**

**This is a Happy morning. Anytime a child is born it is a celebration; but especially tonight. As you visit the creche at the end of our service this morning, think back to what I said at the start of this homily. After our brief time here today, we'll return to the routines of our holiday celebrations and eventually our day-to-day activities. But let us not soon forget what we professed just moments ago in our creed and what was proclaimed in the Gospel, a line so important that our only human gesture; the only act we have to offer is to bow the knee: that our lord was "Begotten of the Holy Ghost" and that "The Word was Made Flesh." Today, Christ our Lord, the Second person of the Trinity leaves the heights of heaven to be born a tiny, helpless, infant. A Birth that ensures our Salvation.**

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.  
Amen.**