Let Us Go to Bethlehem!

After hearing the “good news” that in the city of David a savior has been born who is Messiah and Lord, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us” (Lk 2:15). This invitation by the shepherds has been immortalized in the Christmas carol Adeste Fideles, an originally Latin tune that is presently known to us as “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” the first line of the English translation by Frederick Oakeley. The opening stanza goes, “O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant! O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold him, born the King of Angels.”

Tonight, at Midnight Mass, Christian faithful all over the world would respond to the invitation of the shepherds, “Let us go to Bethlehem.” Some would literally go to the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, but millions more would go to other “Bethlehems”—basilicas, cathedrals, churches, chapels, and other places of worship. There, they would find the Infant lying in the manger. Interestingly, in the Philippines, Bethlehem is at times shortened to “Belen” to mean the tableau of the Nativity. Filipinos go to Bethlehem/ Belen to adore Christ the Lord.

To attend Mass is likewise to go to Bethlehem in the true sense of the word. The name Bethlehem means “house of bread.” The Eucharistic allusion to the Infant Jesus is known since ancient times. The Infant will someday reveal himself as the “Living Bread come down from heaven” (Jn 6:51). He will give his flesh as food and his blood as drink so that people may have eternal life. In the Eucharist, he makes it possible for us to partake of himself, the Bread of Life. And while he is laid in the patinhé, which is a stall or manger for animals, the Infant is in reality “food” for our souls.

Pope Francis dwelt on this image in his Christmas homily last year. He said, “Bethlehem is the turning point that alters the course of history. There God, in the house of bread, is born in a manger. It is as if he wanted to say: ‘Here I am, as your food.’ He does not take, but gives us to eat; he does not give us a mere thing, but his very self. In Bethlehem, we discover that God does not take life, but gives it. To us, who from birth are used to taking and eating, Jesus begins to say: ‘Take and eat. This is my body’ (Mt 26:26). The tiny body of the Child of Bethlehem speaks to us of a new way to live our lives: not by devouring and hoarding, but by sharing and giving. God makes himself small so that he can be our food. By feeding on him, the bread of life, we can be reborn in love, and break the spiral of grasping and greed. From the ‘house of bread,’ Jesus brings us back home, so that we can become God’s family, brothers and sisters to our neighbours. Standing before the manger, we understand that the food of life is not material riches but love, not gluttony but charity, not ostentation but simplicity.”

Vamos a Belen. This is an invitation for us to visit the Christmas creche to behold the beautiful presentation of the birth of the Messiah, a tradition begun by St. Francis of Assisi in order to relive the memory of the first Christmas. It is likewise an invitation for us to draw to Jesus alive and present in the Eucharistic celebration and to receive him in Holy Communion. Pope Francis invites us to reflect on this challenge: “Tonight, as we hear the summons to go up to Bethlehem, the house of bread, let us ask ourselves: What is the bread of my life, what is it that I cannot do without? Is it the Lord, or something else? Then, as we enter the stable, sensing in the tender poverty of the newborn Child a new fragrance of life, the odor of simplicity, let us ask ourselves: ‘Do I really need all these material objects and complicated recipes for living?’ Jesus is bread for the journey. He does not like long, drawn-out meals, but bids us rise quickly from table in order to serve, like bread broken for others.

At Christmas, do we break our bread with those who have none?

Fr. Gil Alinsangan, SSP

A Blessed Christmas to All!  Sambuhay Staff
Entrance Antiphon (Ps 2:7) (Recited when there is no opening song)

The Lord said to me: You are my Son. It is I who have begotten you this day.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here)

P — The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(The priest may address the assembly with these or similar words)

P — On this most holy night, Jesus the Savior is born to give joy to the world and to save us from sin.
Though almighty and powerful, God strips himself of his glory and makes himself small. This God-become-man is the one we welcome tonight. He is our Emmanuel, our God-with-us.

Penitential Act

P — Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries. (Pause)
All — I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do (strike your breast) through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.
P — May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
All — Amen.

Collect

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

God, who have made this most sacred night radiant with the splendor of the true light, grant, we pray, that we, who have known the mysteries of his light on earth, may also delight in his gladness in heaven.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

First Reading [Is 9:1-6] (Sit)

The prophet Isaiah had foretold the birth of a child who would be the Messiah and Prince of Peace. Tonight, we witness the fulfillment of that prophecy in the birth of Christ the Lord.

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah

THE PEOPLE who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as men make merry when dividing spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian. For every boot that tangled in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for flames. For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, from David's throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this!
— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 96)

R — Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord. E. C. Marfori

C
F
G
To-day is born our Sa-vior,
F
C
G

Christ the Lord.

1. Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all you lands. Sing to the Lord; bless his name. (R)

2. Announce his salvation, day after day. Tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds. (R)

3. Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and what fills it resound; let the plains be joyful and all that is in them! Then shall all the trees of the forest exult. (R)

4. They shall exult before the Lord, for he comes/ for he comes to rule the earth/ He shall rule the world with justice/ and the peoples with his constancy. (R)

Second Reading [Ti 2:11-14]

The apostle Paul tells us that our response to the grace of salvation offered through Jesus Christ is to reject godless ways and live a just and devout life.

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to Titus

BELOVED: The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless
ways and worldly desires and
to live temperately, justly,
and devoutly in this age, as
we await the blessed hope,
the appearance of the glory
of our great God and savior
Jesus Christ, who gave himself
for us to deliver us from all
lawlessness and to cleanse for
himself a people as his own,
eager to do what is good.
— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Alleluia [Lk 2:10-11] (Stand)
All — Alleluia, alleluia.
I proclaim to you good news
of great joy: today a Savior is
born for us, Christ the Lord.
Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [Lk 2:1-14]
P — A reading from the holy
Gospel according to Luke
All — Glory to you, O Lord.

IN THOSE DAYS a decree went
out from Caesar Augustus that
the whole world should be
enrolled. This was the first
enrollment, when Quirinius
was governor of Syria. So all
went to be enrolled, each to
his own town. And Joseph too
went up from Galilee from the
town of Nazareth to Judea, to
the city of David that is called
Bethlehem, because he was of
the house and family of David,
to be enrolled with Mary, his
 betrothed, who was with child.
While they were there, the
time came for her to have her
child, and she gave birth to
her firstborn son. She wrapped
him in swaddling clothes and
laid him in a manger because
there was no room for them
in the inn.

Now there were shepherds
in that region living in the
fields and keeping the night
watch over their flock. The
angel of the Lord appeared
to them and the glory of the
Lord shone around them, and
they were struck with great
fear. The angel said to them,
“Do not be afraid; for behold,
I proclaim to you good news
of great joy that will be for all
the people. For today in the city
of David a savior has been born
for you who is Christ and Lord.
And this will be a sign for you:
you will find an infant wrapped
in swaddling clothes and lying
in a manger.” And suddenly
there was a multitude of the
heavenly host with the angel,
praising God and saying:
“Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to those
on whom his favor rests.”
— The Gospel of the Lord.
All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus
Christ.

Homily (Sit)

Profession of Faith (Stand)
All — I believe in one God,
the Father almighty, maker of
heaven and earth, of all things
visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus
Christ, the Only Begotten Son
of God, born of the Father
before all ages. God from God,
Light from Light, true God
from true God, begotten, not
made, consubstantial with
the Father; through him all
tings were made. For us
men and for our salvation he
came down from heaven, (all
kneel at the words that follow
up to and including Incarnate )
AND BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS
INCARNATE of the Virgin Mary
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate, he
suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third
day in accordance with the
Scriptures. He ascended into
heaven and is seated at the
right hand of the Father. He
will come again in glory to
dudge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no
end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life, who
proceeds from the Father and
the Son, who with the Father
and the Son is adored and
glorified, who has spoken
through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy,
catholic, and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the
forgiveness of sins and I look
forward to the resurrection of
the dead and the life of the
world to come. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful
P — Through Jesus our
‘Emmanuel,’ let us present to
the Father our hopes, fears,
and longings of all humanity.
Trusting in his faithfulness and
compassion we pray:
R — Lord of glory, hear our
prayer.
C — That the Church and her
leaders may continue to be
visible signs of your peace
among men and women of
goodwill. We pray: (R)
C — That civil and political
leaders may imitate your Son
who emptied himself of power
and glory, sought the weak
and the lost, and gave up his
life for the salvation of all. We
pray: (R)
C — That those whose hearts
are hardened by sin may realize
the value of living in peace
through the reception of the
Sacrament of Reconciliation.
We pray: (R)
C — That the poor, the sick
and infirm, the lonely and
homeless, and the sorrowful
may find hope and joy in the
coming of the Savior. We pray:
(R)
C — That our brothers and
sisters who cannot be with their
families tonight—doctors and
nurses in hospitals, migrant
workers abroad, soldiers and
police on duty, prisoners in
jails—may still experience
the comfort of your presence
through the generosity and
companionship of the people
near them. We pray: (R)
C — Let us pray for the urgent
concerns of our community
and our personal intentions
(pause), we pray: (R)

P — Heavenly Father, tonight
we rejoice at the birth of your
Son. As we celebrate his
humanity, let him be our light,
joy, and peace.
We ask this through Christ
our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY
OF THE EUCHARIST

Presentation of the Gifts
(Stand)
P — Pray, brethren...
All — May the Lord accept
the sacrifice at your hands for the
praise and glory of his name,
for our good, and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P — May the oblation of this day’s feast be pleasing to you, O Lord, we pray, that through this most holy exchange we may be found in the likeness of Christ, in whom our nature is united to you.

Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

All — Amen.

Preface III of the Nativity of the Lord

P — The Lord be with you.

All — And with your spirit.

P — Lift up your hearts.

All — We lift them up to the Lord.

P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All — It is right and just.

P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

For through him the holy exchange that restores our life has shone forth today in splendor: when our frailty is assumed by your Word not only does human mortality receive unending honor but by this wondrous union, we, too, are made eternal.

And so, in company with the choirs of Angels, we praise you, and with joy we proclaim:

All — Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Invocation to Communion

P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon (Jn 1:14)

The Word became flesh, and we have seen his glory.

Prayer after Communion

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

Grant us, we pray, O Lord our God, that we, who are gladdened by participation in the feast of our Redeemer’s Nativity, may through an honorable way of life become worthy of union with him.

Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

All — Amen.

The Concluding Rites

The Lord’s Prayer

P — The Lord be with you.

All — And with your spirit.

Solemn Blessing

P — Bow down for the blessing. (Pause)

May the God of infinite goodness, who by the Incarnation of his Son has driven darkness from the world and by that glorious Birth has illumined this most holy night, drive far from you the darkness of vice and illuminate your hearts with the light of virtue.

All — Amen.

P — May God, who by the Incarnation brought together the earthly and heavenly realm, fill you with the gift of his peace and favor and make you sharers with the Church in heaven.

All — Amen.

P — And may God, who by the Incarnation brought together the earthly and heavenly realm, fill you with the gift of his peace and favor and make you sharers with the Church in heaven.

All — Amen.

Dismissal

P — Go forth, the Mass is ended.

All — Thanks be to God.