

***We are praying for you this  
Christmas.***

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We gather on this holy night not in chapels, or churches or cathedrals to sing carols and hear the Christmas story, but we gather in our homes.

Physically apart, yet still held together in one mystical communion called the church. And somehow, through a great act of God, you and I remain connected to one another. We remain connected to the communion of saints in light; to all the heavenly host; and, to all those who went before us who, like John, pointed us to the Light. What a remarkable gift. Apart, yet still connected.

A friend posted a photo of his great aunt in Montreal for Christmas. “This is my great aunt Margaret’s 108th Christmas; and like for many of us, it will be her first one not surrounded by family and friends.” And there she was sitting upright, poised on her couch, dressed in her Christmas blazer and blouse, looking every bit of half her age. That’s astounding, I thought. For the first time in our lives, on such a scale we find ourselves isolated from the very communities that give us life; and from the people we love; all in order for us to preserve life.

On Christmas Eve we think on many things. There is no other time of the year where the traditions and the nostalgia become so concretely both buoyant and burdensome at the same time.

One of the things that does it for me are the decorations. An ornament that was given by friend; or handed down from a family member. Each ornament taken out of the box and unwrapped from the tissue paper reveals its own story.

I have a nativity scene whose figures were made by my grandmother, and the manger was built by my father. In assembling that scene each year I am given a concrete reminder that they handled these things. They touched them. And they handed them on to me. In a way, they have pointed me to the Light; and I am still mysteriously connected to them.

Isn't that how it works? Receiving something that was given, and embracing it as Life.

“Behold I bring you news of great joy;” announced the angels to the shepherds, “for unto us a child is born in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord, and this will be a sign for you...

A concrete sign of a gift given.

It is said that the first and finest theological act is to listen and receive.

“Hear, O Israel”

“Greetings, favoured one.”

“Behold, I bring you news of great joy.”

All of these encounters call the respondent to listen and receive. It's what Abraham and Moses did; it's what Mary and Elizabeth did; it's what the shepherds and the magi did. They all listened and received something they could never tell themselves or invent themselves.

What we have been given is the gift of the Christ child lying in a manger. The eternal Word that became flesh. God entering into the circumstances of our lives so that God becomes connected to us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a Christmas letter to pastors writes: “... the testimony of Christmas for all human beings is you have been accepted: God has not despised you but bodily bears the flesh and blood of you all. Look at the manger!”

This Christmas, like no other, may you hold on to the testimony of John, hear the news of the angels, and follow the sign of the star, for it all points to where we find our Life and our Light, and reminds us concretely of Emmanuel: God with us.