



## **Isaiah 62:6-12; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:8-20** **Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (December 25, 2022)**

Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Anointed of God, the Christ.

Christians think exclusively of Jesus when they hear the words the 'Son of God.' But the phrase had a life of its own before it was applied to Jesus...referring to angels (Genesis 6:2), the whole people called Israel (Hosea 11:1), and to the king in David's line (Psalm 2:7). Direct revelation extends God's favor to people and angels; each is 'the Son,' 'the beloved,' as Jesus became in his vision at his baptism (Mark 1:11).

It also had a life of its own at the time that Jesus lived and when the gospels were being written because "the world of Jesus made no distinction between politics and religion. The Romans not only obeyed the emperor, but they also worshipped him as God's son, *Divi filius*." To democratize the notion of "Son of God" was an affront to the Empire. Surely the Gospel writers (and Paul before them) knew this. That title plus the reference to the "Kingdom of God" that Jesus used so often were both red flags to the ruling Empire of Jesus' day.

Luke does not mind engaging in political and subversive speech. The powerful are ignored. It's the simple that receive the message. The birth of Jesus story is a prelude to all that will come next in the gospels. God intervenes and sides with the little ones. However, God's message is offered to all. It requires an act of hospitality, an openness of the heart, an intimate reception, and a radical commitment. People receive it or reject it. There is a death or life decision to be taken. God has taken His/Hers and that full commitment has taken God to the cross. What are we going to do? How are we going to respond?

It's delightful to think of those folks, the shepherds, who were just going about their business, expecting nothing more than another long night, when suddenly they became the audience for an angelic chorus. The angels' is quite a sensational message. Perhaps we're fascinated by sophisticated language like swaddling clothes and the manger. That language is far more dramatic than saying, "Go to a little town nearby and you'll find a baby in diapers, sleeping in a feedbox."

What a sign! A baby wearing diapers! Yet, that's the message of this feast. The Gospel of John gives us all the solemnity we can handle with the solemn proclamation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." But that glorious declaration simply tells us that the Word of God became mortal, limited, and needy. Jesus the Christ, the Word of God incarnate, needed someone to change his diapers. The scandal of Christmas is that it reveals that this is how God comes: vulnerable and fragile, unwelcomed at home while revered by the poor and the strangers.

The nativity stories include hints of the end — both the cross and resurrection, Jesus' rejection and love's triumph through him. Christmas reminds us that God remains among us weak and

mild. The baby Jesus can represent a sweet message and also the earth-shattering revelation that God's power is the antithesis of domination. The shepherds and Magi, Caesar and Herod, remind us that not everyone desires Emmanuel, God-with-us, and that those who reject Emmanuel will stop at nothing to carry out their plan.

Today, it is we who must incarnate the promise of peace to people of goodwill. In a world in which at least 30 nations are at war, we who flock to the manger are called and empowered to become sacraments of Emmanuel. Let us wonder at the babe and remember that we must be the body of Christ today. That's why he came in the first place.