

+ CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT MASS

December 25, 2019

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit Amen.

*For unto us a Child is born, and a son to us is given...and His name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace.*¹

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
My very dear sons,

Tonight the argument is complete; the reason for all things has been stated in our hearing; the solution to the world's problems (or to this great puzzle which the entire world really is) has now been provided; the Word has been uttered—or rather, in fact, it is always uttered, eternally uttered by the Father, but now especially for us. This is not just any word, but the very Word of God, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the Word in Person, come to earth through His taking of flesh. He is clothed in our human nature, not just as in the manner of the material clothes we wrap around us, but in a deeper sense, as a living nature that this Divine Person has assumed for Himself, in what we call the Incarnation. Here we see the very Word by which the universe was made, lying on a bit of straw in a manger, in a feeding trough for domestic animals. Here we enter the deepest designs of God.

Who is this Child? This is, perhaps, the biggest question. Before the mystery and the marvel of Christmas, it would be easy enough to express our ideas and personal opinions, since the episode of Christ's birth is a fathomless source of inspiration. No philosopher, poet, or political statesman ever found a richer subject for discussion. However, precisely because of the sheer height of the inspiration that flows from Christ's beginnings on earth, it is no doubt better to keep the myriad profusion of our feeble human thoughts under a sacred silence, under the silence of this Holy Night, and to let God Himself tell us what it is all about, about who He is.

Who is He? Numerous are the passages of Holy Scripture that might be brought forth in order to enlighten our minds on this subject: there is but the embarrassment of making a choice. One privileged voice concerning the event we are considering is that of the royal prophet Isaiah. It was from afar that he contemplated the coming of the Messiah, but he speaks as if he were already present in the Stable of Bethlehem. *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given...*² The one chosen to become King of the Jews and to save all Nations along with the chosen people might have come to us in the fullness of his manhood, as an adult, a perfect man. But instead, the Wisdom of God chose to give Him to us a baby, as an infant (which means one who does not yet speak), as a child. Here is the very Word of God, the very Wisdom of God, sought for centuries by mankind, who does not utter a single audible word, but who speaks to us through his silence, his tears, and, perhaps, his smiles.

¹ Isaiah 9:6.

² Ibid.

So, who is this Child? No ordinary child, for *the government shall be upon His shoulder*.³ What government could this be? Given the prophet nature of the message, it could only be one of very great importance; it could only be a government worthy of the long awaited Messiah. There may be other ways of understanding the Hebrew expression here relative to the shoulder, but for us Christians, we can hardly keep from thinking of the Cross Christ will bear at the fullness of time and of His ministry and interpret the allusion to government as a mysterious reference to the universal government that belongs to Christ the King, a kingdom not of this world, but having authority even over the world below. How we long even now to see the justice of God chase away the immense multitude of evil laws and actions of men that so sadden us as we look around us.

And His Name shall be called Wonderful.⁴ We live in an age of countless technical wonders. There seems to be no limit of what post-modern mankind can accomplish in the domain of communications, of armaments, and of medical technology. And yet we have lost touch with real wonder. We no longer see the stars except through computer applications; we accumulate knowledge to such an extent by means of the overabundance of information, that we are surprised by nothing, moved by nothing, enchanted by very little, if anything. We are children lost in the woods of life, who cannot see the forest for the trees, who, more importantly, cannot see the path through the woods. Well, the Child of Bethlehem, as no other, restores our sense of true wonder, if only we will pause a moment to enter into the contemplative silence of Christmas, if only we can let ourselves be purified and converted by this one whose name is Wonderful. Even the ox and donkey gave upon Him as if in wonder.

Counsellor. This mere baby, furthermore, is *the* Counsellor, the greatest of all counselors, as He has access to the highest of all Council rooms, that of the Three Divine Persons, where He sits with full membership, having active and passive voice, in His Divine Person.

God the Mighty. Can this diminutive human being, lying there in the Manger be Almighty God Himself? Nothing would seem less likely in appearance. But it pleases God to do surprising, extraordinary things, because He is God. No, in fact, this Child rules the Heavens from his Crib. He is the Almighty Lord of the stars, the seas, and all that comprises the created world.

The Father of the world to come. That is Father of the Christian world that was to come after His birth, Father of eternal life. Adam engendered us for time; Christ for eternity. Adam engendered us for the earth, Christ for Heaven.

The Prince of Peace. Salomon, *Rex Pacificus*, was the type and figure of Christ to come, the truer peaceful king, who would later say to His disciples: *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto, not as the world giveth....Let not your heart be troubled*.⁵

Let us too rejoice in this light and this love incarnate, bringing us the only real and lasting peace. Amen, Alleluia.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ St. John 14:27.