

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The annual joyful celebration of the coming among us of God's incarnated Word challenges us time and time again. By coming to live among us as a newborn Child, the "Emmanuel" compels us to question our way of thinking about God and His relation to humanity. For this newborn Child is God's Son, the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. He is, indeed, God – with – us.

When God almighty revealed Himself to Elijah, He made Himself known by the rustling of a small and soft breeze (1 Kings 19: 12-13), thus making the prophet aware of his false and all-too-human ideas of God's presence in the world. In the same line, but much more radically, this Child, in whom dwells the whole fullness of divinity (Col. 2:9), turns upside-down what human beings naturally expect God to be.

The mystery of incarnation teaches us that in Christ all the fullness of God lives in a human body. But since becoming a human being implies development and growing, from conception to death, the mystery of incarnation implies that God's fullness was alive during all the stages of Jesus' life on earth. And so, on Christmas day we contemplate this fullness in a Child that is totally dependent on its earthly parents. As the letter to the Hebrews teaches us (1:2), God Himself speaks to us "in his Son". He does so today in this newborn Child. We have not to wait for the fully glorified Christ, as represented in the apse of many churches, before starting to listen. We can listen today, to this silent and helpless Word.

Even on this day, from the crib, He reveals His glory, although it has nothing in common with what we, thinking humanly, would associate with "glory". In awe, we behold a Child who made Himself totally dependent on others who will teach Him to walk, to speak, to pray, to read, and many other things. We cannot be but awe-stricken while contemplating God's word in this Child.

Revealing His humility, God, silently, reveals His love for the world He created (John 3:16), along with His trust in humanity, for it is among ordinary people that God found those who would educate His Word and make it fully human, because it belongs to human nature that no-one can become human without significant relationships with other people. Among those around the crib, we behold His holy Mother, who holds a preeminent place. So does Saint Joseph. But many others have had a part in the hidden life of Jesus during these important years about which the Gospel remains silent.

Commenting on the prologue of the Gospel according to Saint John, Irenaeus of Lyons wrote: “God’s Word placed his dwelling among men and made Himself a son of men, to make men accustomed to understand God and to make God accustomed to place his dwelling in the human being according to the Father’s will.” It is as if Saint Irenaeus regards the incarnation of the Word, foretold already in the Jewish Bible, as a spiritual process of learning, by which God and humanity learn from each other.

Let us hasten ourselves to this school of divine learning, to be taught by the Son of God and Mary. Let us offer to Him our being, so that He may dwell in us and work through us, be born and grow in us and among us. Let us receive Him and recognize Him in our communities as they are. Let us make His love tangible, every day.

We cannot equal God’s profound humility, but to keep on trying to equal it is our only way to happiness and beyond happiness to glory.

Wishing you all, in unity of prayer, a blessed Christmas,

+ Jos Wouters o.praem., abbot general