

Everyone, Everything Is Welcome to the Story

Homily for Christmas Eve, 5 pm service

I love to see children gathered near the altar, looking at the creche, learning the old story.

This past week for the preschool children I read Tommy dePaola's *The Christmas Pageant*—which of course retells the story. See the pageant in your mind's eye even now: the children as sheep, shepherds, the innkeeper, the lowly donkey, the wise and wealthy magi—the teenage Mary and Joseph.

And even, perhaps, a lobster or two (if I may reference the rom-com classic *Love Actually*).

All creation in other words, people, animals, angels and stars.

Come to see the king.

Christ the king born this day of Mary in the little town of Bethlehem is a story the angels tell the world.

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill among all people!"

Jesus is God's gift to us. Forever.

And everyone and everything is welcome to and part of the story

Not only the story told in the creche—the story of the those who came then—but the Christmas stories being written now by those who have come today—those who are young, those who in the mid stream rush of life—working hard, raising the children— and those who are older, with many a Christmas gone by.

Everyone, everything is welcome to the story.

When I make this invitation I am quoting from an essay by Charles Dickens, "What Christmas Is As We Grow Older"—written in 1851, some years after his famous story, *A Christmas Carol*. Let me quote a little more:

“As we grow older, let us be more thankful that the circle of our Christmas associations and of the lessons that they bring, expands! Let us welcome every one of them, and summon them to take their places by the Christmas hearth.

Welcome, old aspirations, glittering creatures of an ardent fancy, to your shelter underneath the holly! We know you, and have not outlived you yet. Welcome, old projects and old loves, however fleeting, to your nooks among the steadier lights that burn around the yule log.

On this day we shut out Nothing!

“Pause,” says a low voice. “Nothing? Think!”

“On Christmas Day, we will shut out from our fireside, Nothing.”

“Not the shadow of a vast City where the withered leaves are lying deep?” the voice replies. “Not the shadow that darkens the whole globe? Not the shadow of the City of the Dead?”

Not even that. Lost friend, lost child, lost parent, sister, brother, husband, wife, we will not so discard you! You shall hold your cherished places in our Christmas hearts, and by our Christmas fires; and in the season of immortal hope, and on the birthday of immortal mercy, we will shut out Nothing!”

For nothing is beyond the boundless love of God. The love that came down this night, this holy night, in the form of a newborn child. The love that dwelled among us full of grace and truth. The love that taught the disciples and healed the suffering and still stirs the hopes of a fearful world. The love which went even to the cross for us, the love that could not die and was raised, the love ascended, the love come down in the Spirit, the love even now within us, the love that will never be conquered, the love that will finally overcome all darkness and death itself.

This is the night, the holy night—let us rejoice and be glad in it—whatever age we are.

In the name of the Holy One born to us this day of Mary, Amen.

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