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AMDG

Christmas 2016

Good morning, everyone. Merry Christmas!

This season can sure be overwhelming, can't it? All the buying and baking, shopping and mailing, the parties and visits, and travelling. By this point you might feel just a little like me...tired and numb.

So, it's nice to just take breath breath and just enjoy being here for a second or too...and have a few moments to reflect on the real gift of this season – the gift of God in Christ, and what it all means.

Because, the truly overwhelming gift of Christmas is God becoming human, and not just becoming human, but becoming a baby, born to a poor unwed girl, forced to give birth to the Divine Child in a barn. Luke tells us that at first the shepherds were terrified, but then were so filled with joy they went out and told everyone what they had seen, and everyone who heard was amazed. Then they returned to their lives glorifying God. They were transformed.

But, what was so special about a baby in a barn that could have been so amazing, so transformative. Well, what they saw, there amidst the mess and stink of a stable was not just a baby, and not just a glimpse of the Divine - not God as transcendent, unknowable, unreachable God, but God as a human being just like us, flesh and blood, fragile, and beautiful. What they all saw was the gift of Incarnation - they saw **themselves** in that baby - and not the selves that struggle, the selves that want, that fear, that suffer - they saw their true selves, their Divine selves, the innocent and loving selves that they were meant to be. Martin Luther called that moment the Divine Exchange, a sort of new birth. Christmas is meant to be that new birth for us, a transformation into Christ's birth. And it does not come through demonstrations of strength or power, but through vulnerability. And letting ourselves be vulnerable allows God to show us who we really are. While the world might try to

convince us that it is strength and wealth that transform us into what we're meant to be, the gift of Christmas proclaims the opposite. And, we know this in our hearts, regardless of what the charlatans of the world might proclaim. It's why we keep coming back again, and again to this simple stable, because we can sense that it holds truth within that goes beyond the outer humility of a barnyard. Our Christmas movies are filled with it – George Bailey's transformation in *It's a Wonderful Life* after hitting bottom and wanting to end his life, Scrooge's transformation by his encounters with the Christmas ghosts, the Bishop's transformation in his encounter with the Angel Cary Grant. They all try to tell the same story – that we have it within us to be better than we are. That the broken or burdened selves we try so desperately to hide from the world are not who we really are. In the movies it takes angels and ghosts to spark the transformation, because angels and ghosts knock us off kilter, shake us out of our displays of self-satisfaction and self-assurance, or our defensiveness and fear, or cynicism and complacency and make us vulnerable and open. And we need to be vulnerable and open in order to be connected to our Divine Selves so we may be transformed into the pure love God created us to be.

If we believe in the gift of Christmas - that God became a vulnerable, frail human being then we can embrace our own human condition, as God did. We can be assured that we have it in us to live Jesus lived putting himself out there, connecting with other vulnerable people. He touched lepers and those whom the community shunned. He gave love and hope to the poor. He ate with tax collectors and sinners. He spoke truth to power. And he walked boldly into Jerusalem, when he knew the leaders there wanted him dead.

But, that was Jesus, you say? I'm not perfect like Him?

Well, that's the whole point of Incarnation, to show us that we don't have to become some perfect other-worldly being to do God's work. We don't have to self-improve or self-help. we just have to be ourselves, our

human, fragile, vulnerable selves...and in being ourselves we become closest to God,

The Pope has been a good example for the world in being vulnerable. This humble and happy man, shows us what it looks like to be Christ for others – inviting the homeless into his humble apartment to share his birthday meal, embracing the sick and disfigured, awkwardly but boldly proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed.

But that's the Pope, you say, he's a holy man?

Well, there are many examples right here in our community– those serving deported migrants at Kino Border Initiative, the Green Valley Woodworkers who work all year making wooden toys to give away at the St. Andrew's Children's Clinic. And, examples here in our parish, who make serving the poor and healing the sick, part of their daily lives. We needn't feel we have to take on big, grand projects to follow Jesus. If we accept that God is within us, that we have that divine spark, we can start living the transformation in our daily lives.

When people disagree with us, rather than arguing our point, we listen to their perspective, endeavoring to understand them rather than dismissing them.

When we are hurt, we can try to forgive those who hurt us. When we hurt others we can ask for forgiveness.

Those of us who have trouble asking others for help – can start asking for help.

Those of us who are afraid to do new things on our own, we take risks and try new things without asking for help or advice.

And for most of us, regardless of our circumstances, it means throwing ourselves headfirst into life, into an existence so wonderful and extraordinary that God chose to be with us in it.

If we accept God's gift of vulnerability, then we must we accept that God has given us the power to face whatever life puts before us, to open ourselves to others, to open ourselves to possible pain or embarrassment,

and to be the love and acceptance for those around us who might be alone, afraid, or in pain.

God's gift to us in his Incarnation through Jesus Christ, is the gift of vulnerability, a vulnerability that can transform and give us the power to be Christ for others. Christmas frees us from the burden of fear and shame; and transforms us into confident and joyful children of God. Will we accept this gift? Will we let go of the fear that keeps us overwhelmed and truly powerless? Or will we open ourselves to the transformation of Christmas, to be changed for ourselves and for each other, into the love God intended...

In the words of the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, let us pray...

*Moonless darkness stands between.  
Past, O Past, no more be seen!  
But the Bethlehem star may lead me  
To the sight of Him who freed me  
From the self that I have been.  
Make me pure, Lord: Thou art holy;  
Make me meek, Lord: Thou wert lowly;  
Now beginning, and always:  
Now begin, on Christmas day.*

*“Moonless Darkness Stands Between”  
by Gerard Manley Hopkins*