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Midnight Mass
at the
Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
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The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

Merry Christmas dear friends!

The Savior whose birth we await with such joyful anticipation every year is a savior for us – for you and me! His birth is not just a story from ancient history. Somehow each year it is new, a real gift.

And yet, it has no material price tag. We know what it is – it is not something that is entirely a surprise. But we look to it each year. We wait for it, prepare for it, pray for it. And if for some reason we do not look forward to Christmas – if some Christmas loss or deep hurt, or extra pressure makes it a difficult time for us – know this: that Christmas is a supernatural grace and gift. Through it God has saved the world and so it has the power to heal. It has the power to give us a new start.

Let us never forget: It is the birth of our Savior. It is the gift of God coming to man. It is the announcement of our redemption, an event that – having happened on one day in history – has forever changed human history. It is an event that will endure for all eternity. Glory to God in the highest!

The English spiritual writer, Caryll Houslander, reminds of the delicate nature of the mystery of Christ's birth. She wrote, "How small and gentle His coming was. He came as an infant. ... God approaches gently, often secretly, always in love, never through violence and fear." (*The Passion of the Infant Christ*. Sheed and Ward, p. 44)

Indeed He sent angels to say, "Do not be afraid!"

I was talking to a young gentleman recently who was telling about the new baby in their family, their third child. He was talking about how it changes the schedule and the focus of things in their day to day life. It is interesting to see how a tiny human being who can do so little, changes the focus of attention, the time schedules, the sleep habits of everyone in the house. The baby changes the volume and tone of our voices, and we always listening for those little sounds. We move carefully, we touch gently. We become attentive to simple things. We take joy in minute accomplishments.

This father told me how he was very busy at work, but when he got home, he was spending more time playing with his kids. For his prayer time in the early morning, often he takes the

baby and sits quietly in a chair by the window before everyone else gets up. Work is important. Prayer is vital. Being together is too precious a gift from God to let pass.

St. Augustine writes, "Wake up, mankind! For your sake God has become man. ... Had He not been born in time, you would have suffered eternal death. If it had not been for His mercy, you would have suffered everlasting unhappiness. You would have been lost. You would have perished, had He not come!"

The Catechism reminds us: "Jesus Christ is the key, the center, and the purpose of the whole of man's history." (CCC, no 450) If faith allows you, bring this truth to your meditation: Jesus Christ is the KEY to human history.

Christmas is a Holy Night: then and now. "Long lay the world, in sin and error pining, till He appeared and the soul felt its worth."

If faith allows you, think about the events of history – think about the events of your own life. Our tendency is to attempt to figure them out. No, I don't think we have the wherewithal to figure them out, but to whatever extent we try to accept them, the events of our history – try using as the KEY, Jesus Christ.

Allow yourself to regard everything using Him as the interpretive key, the overriding purpose, the center point. Again, it is not likely within our grasp – this side of heaven – to understand so many mysteries of this life. However, let us contemplate the life of Jesus Christ: His announcement by all the prophets, His Incarnation, His quiet life, His public ministry, His dying and rising to new life; His return to the Father; their gift of the Holy Spirit; His promise to come again. Mysteries will remain, but I assure you that nothing can make sense without Jesus Christ.

A baby in the family changes everything in a gentle way. Allow the birth of Jesus Christ, which is real, to change you. Allow Him to modify the habits and the focus and the purpose of your life. He will not force you. He cannot pressure you. But He invites you to let Him be your Savior. He will redeem and transform the issues and the problems that, without Him, might otherwise destroy you and me, and rob us of our serenity and peace.

Remember the words of the angels, sent by God to poor shepherds, and proclaimed to all as the Gospel, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord."

On behalf of Bishop Boland and myself, I extend to you and all your loved ones, our prayerful best wishes for a Blessed Christmas and Holy New Year!