



Are You Ready for Christmas?

Reflection by Deacon Rick Medina

Are you all ready for Christmas? When someone asks you this question, what is your typical response? This is what I typically hear:

Well, I am trying to get last-minute things done. I am trying to finish work before the end of the year, or I am trying to finish my Christmas shopping, I am trying to finish projects at school, or I have to finish decorating the house. Then you hear this chorus from people - I'm running out of time. Aaaahhh! I can't believe Christmas is almost here.

Have you ever stopped to think about the question being asked? What does it mean to be ready for Christmas? Did God become Emmanuel for this – so that we will be busy running around, maybe even stressed out at the number of things yet to be done? So this year, how about a different Christmas, a Christmas with a Difference?

There are many ways to celebrate Christmas that are different from any other Christmases celebrated in the past.

How about allowing yourself to be surprised? I am not talking about gifts from people you hope to be surprised with. I am talking about God surprising you this Christmas and the years to come.

Our God is a God who loves surprises. Mary was surprised. Joseph was surprised. The world was surprised. Could it be? Could God love us this much? The facts speak for themselves. Here we are two thousand years later, and we are still celebrating the birth of our Lord. Advent is full of beautiful surprises and great expectations. First, we celebrate the arrival of the infant child. Then, we celebrate the possibility of the second coming of the Lord. But most of all, we await the personal coming of the Lord into our life with great expectation. *Yes, here's the great revelation of the day worthy of our contemplation: 'God's journey from Heaven to earth was not the impossible journey. The most difficult journey the Lord must travel is from Heaven to our heart.'*

God was successful in entering Joseph's heart through a dream. He came into Mary's heart from an angel. And now the Lord wishes to go into our heart through the sacraments, through His Church, through people He placed in our midst. Have I received the Lord today? Have I gone to Confession? The Lord eagerly awaits a room in my heart.

Give the Lord what he most desires: a place to rest, a place to work, a place to make holy.

Now, I am aware some or perhaps many of us are coming into Christmas with heavy hearts. Many times, when our plans are foiled and our hopes left unfulfilled we get nervous, or angry, or doubtful. And yet, these are the times when God is guiding us with His infinite wisdom. We must constantly ask God to teach us to discover His will amid life's ups and downs and be docile, like Joseph and Mary.

Here's one more thing to allow God to surprise us this Christmas. **How about seeking the Lord to make all things new?**

It was Joseph's plan to divorce Mary quietly to conceal her shame. That was the best Joseph could think of. However, the Lord had other plans. How many times has the Lord changed your plans? Is your life what you expected it to be when you were a child? Mine surely isn't. Becoming a deacon and preaching in front of a congregation never entered my consciousness. I never thought I would be traveling in the remotest places of the world to empower the poor and spread the message of Christ through my work as Executive Director of Catholic World Mission. I surely never imagined to be working for Catholic World Mission for ten years and counting!

The Lord seeks to make all things new, especially our plans. How does He do it? By placing the right people in our lives; by pointing us in the right direction; by inviting us to *something* to discover His will. **So be open to the possibilities.** Joseph thought he was doing Mary a favor. Instead, the Lord was doing both Mary and Joseph a favor. He invited both of them to his Divine plan. Do you realize that you are part of salvation history? Once upon a time someone in your family tree took a giant leap of faith, was baptized and became a Christian. It may have been just last Easter or it may have been 1,500 Easters ago. Regardless, someone took the giant leap of faith and embraced the faith and the sacraments we sometimes take for granted. Your decision to keep the faith, build the Church, hold consequences far beyond our comprehension. We believe and follow Christ because of decisions made by others long before us.

The gift of faith that people discovered a long time ago and passed on to us is not a gift of the past, but continues to be a gift of the present because we have a living God. Allow yourselves to discover new things with God – to make things new. Allow the Lord to do great things through you. We are God's gift to one another. Be the gift of love that you are in the world. Someone is waiting for it. Someone is dying to receive it. Someone is in need of it. The infant Jesus was born and died for it.

Finally, this Christmas how about putting your hope in God because God has hope in you.

Accept that God loves you exactly where you are, and who you are.

God's choice to become incarnate not only gives us reason to hope in God. The Incarnation also reveals that God has hope in us. Aquinas describes hope as this:

*'hope concerns a future good, difficult, but possible to attain...
possible to attain by means of divine assistance.'*

Hope encourages us to trust that what we do is meaningful, because God is supporting it and actively trying to create good from whatever difficult or even evil situation in which we find ourselves. God has hope in us, enough to enter more deeply into the world and all its troubles rather than flee or turn away from us. Jesus's birth took place in a world with its own particular forms of darkness. His birth took place in the poverty of a stable. He was born as a Jewish child in a land under Roman occupation. And yet, we were told he would be called Emmanuel.

"God is with us" – what is the significance of this? God is present with his people; he does not intervene from a distance but is always close to us, always active, sometimes in most unexpected ways.

So, I ask again, 'Are you ready for Christmas?'

This Christmas, let us set aside time to be with Christ. Minutes spent in contemplation of the Divine in the crib can yield abundant fruit. Spend time with Christ as part of your many activities planned this Christmas.

Who knows, if we slow down enough, maybe we'll hear and discern the voice of God amid the cacophony of human noise. So let's make room to recognize the **surprise** God has in store for us this Christmas. Let's welcome the infant child and allow God to be with us. **Merry Christmas.**