Merry Christmas! The Child is born; the shepherds have returned to their flocks and the surrounding countryside has begun to reverberate with the news of the newborn Child. The world is changed, for God has visited His people, and the Child will grow to manhood. For us who celebrate the presence of the Christ Child through the centuries, the beautiful Advent time of waiting and preparation is fulfilled. Now, it should be our joy to live with the Messiah present in every phase of our daily life.

But something has happened. Along with the joy is the sadness of distraction and the tragedy of denial. For many, Christmas has become almost an anticlimax; the tree, if it is real, may already be shedding needles and will shortly be ready for twelfth night’s burning. The statues of the Child, His mother, Joseph, the shepherds and kings may not even have found their way to a place of continuing honor. What has happened to us?

The change should be so real – how is it seen in our daily life – how will it continue in us – how will the world today know that the Christ Child lives among all of us? There is a fullness of reality for our world that the Son of God is now eternally among us; the son of Mary is present in each of us. Does the world know that reality any more certainly because of the life we should now be living more fully for Him and in Him?

In today’s liturgy Isaiah sings: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation. All the ends of the earth will behold the salvation of our God.” It is our lives that should be fulfilling that ancient prophecy. Can it be heard in Syria, Iraq, in Ferguson, in New York City or in any city or country throughout the world? Isaiah sang centuries before Jesus’ birth; angels sang at Bethlehem; does the world hear us singing today? We sang at the Responsorial Psalm: “All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.” In the way we live, are we making true what we sing today?

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us: “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he has spoken to us through the Son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe.” Has our preparation for today made us realize the times in which we live? Do we realize that it is our lived faith that makes obvious to our world the truth of these words? Doesn’t the world deserve better headlines?

For some of us, the passage from John’s gospel today is very familiar. A few decades ago, we referred to it as the Last Gospel, and it concluded every Eucharistic liturgy. The conclusion of
the liturgy was the proclamation of a beginning: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” “Without Him was made nothing that was made.”

Today, the wonder – the Word Who is the source and model of all that is, becomes the son of Mary: “and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Today we must stop and realize what has happened to us, realize who it is who has come to stay with us, who changes our lives and completes that which makes us fully ourselves, fully human with Him.

And John gives us wonderful reason to discover who has come: “What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” The Word that gives light became flesh and made His dwelling among us, living as one of us. John adds what hopefully is now our life: “and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.” This is what is there to be seen; it is real; we do not need to imagine the reality. It should be seen in the life of all of us.

But John reminds of a sobering reality, present even before the Child has come: “He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him.” Failure to see, failure to accept is, unfortunately part of the Christmas story; it is a phenomenon of our daily life. The challenge of the feast is not simply to know He has come; but that, with simple and profound faith, we make Him known. The Child dwells among us; He dwells within us. The world must be able to see Him in us, in our way of life, in the way we live as He lived.

John adds: “But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name.” As we accept the Child, we become the children of God. It is not dependent upon gender, social status or nationality; it is a moment of grace which is a divine gift, and the consequence for the world is that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we see his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.” We express it in two words today: Merry Christmas!