

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
January 1, 2016

O admirabile commercium

Readings: Numbers 6: 22-27; Galatians 4: 4-7; Luke 2:16-21

At the end of the brief section on the mystery of Christmas, our Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that “to become ‘children of God’ we must be ‘born from above’ or ‘born of God.’ You see, only when Christ is formed in us will the mystery of Christmas be fulfilled in us. Christmas is the mystery of this ‘marvelous exchange’ as we pray in the Antiphon of Evening Prayer for this Solemnity: “O marvelous exchange! Man's Creator has become man, born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity.”¹

The antiphon uses a most curious phrase: "*O admirabile commercium!* O marvelous exchange!" The word could also mean “trade,” as in, “O wonderful trade.”

I learned at an early age that I was not a good liar. I collected Baseball cards, and a younger kid in our neighborhood had a baseball card that I coveted. I offered to make a trade with him, offering him several cards of mine for just one of his. “This is a great deal for you, I said. Look at all the cards you will receive!” He gave a qualified “yes,” but after checking with someone in the house, came out and changed his mind. My hopes were dashed. His card was an old card...mine were new. His card was of a player named Babe Ruth. Truthfully, I would never have forgiven myself had that poor little boy gone for the trade. “*O marvelous exchange!*”

The antiphon is amazing because it uses the language of a deal, connoting even a business deal. Unlike my unethical trade offer to the younger neighborhood boy, here a most *unequal trade* is acknowledged in this antiphon, but with a big difference.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph §526),

The Creator of man, having assumed a living body, deigned to be born of a Virgin, and having become man without our aid, enriched us with His divinity. He willingly humbled himself to be born of a woman in order to render us more like Himself. Our second reading reminds us: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

What a wonderful exchange indeed! God takes on the nature of man to redeem us. Such are the two acts of the wonderful "bargain" that God makes with us: The humanity that the Word takes from us is to serve Him as the instrument for communicating His divine life to us; and this for two reasons wherein eternal wisdom infinitely shines out; the humanity renders God visible...It renders Him visible."²

While we gaze upon our Lord in the manger, we are also very interested in the expressions on the faces of all the others in the scene, and rightly so. What does this even mean for us? Our gaze turns towards those who have made possible our joy, our hope and our redemption. Mary played a crucial role. Harkening again to the OT allusions contained in the antiphons for Vespers, another notes that: "Your blessed and fruitful virginity is like the bush, flaming yet unburned, which Moses saw on Sinai. Pray for us, Mother of God."

When gaze in wonder and awe upon the face of the Blessed Mother, who through her acceptance of God's will manifest through an angel, made possible this marvelous exchange. We are the real winners in this exchange. Rather than feel guilt over our unworthiness, we return to God our profound gratitude.

² Bl. Abbot Marmion (1858-1923), "Christ in His Mysteries," III (1919 A.D.)

We re-commit ourselves to being witnesses to the world of the manifold gift of a Savior. As we commemorate the beginning of a new Civil Year, we beg God's blessing and protection upon our endeavors and upon our nation, as we face unprecedented challenges in a spirit of faith and hope. May we never forget that Jesus Christ is Lord of all seasons and of all time.