

Christmas Eve Mass  
December 24, 2017/ Cathedral of Saint Paul  
Readings: Isaiah 9:1-6; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14

*Marking Time with God!*

It is a reality of human psychology that one's earliest memories tend to be of events clearly out of the ordinary, if not even traumatic. I recall in vivid detail a sustained 100-mph wind storm that coincided with a family Birthday Party on June 30, 1967. A simple "Google" search affirmed the historicity of that Saint Paul storm and my memory of it, held two months before my fourth birthday.

But for me, it was the sound of the sirens that forever seared that moment in my memory. It is in our very nature as created by God that we desire to mark time. Or as some might prefer to say in our positivistic culture, it is "in our DNA." In short, time matters.

Humanity marks time, lest our collective identity slips away. The ancient Romans marked time by naming the individual who held the position of Counsel each year. The Pantheon, still majestically standing nearly 1900 years after its re-construction by the Emperor Hadrian, fixes the year of its initial construction, during the third Roman consulate of Marcus Agrippa, as is still clearly seen in the inscription above the columns.

But we Christians mark time differently. We speak in terms of darkness and light, sin and redemption, prophecy and fulfillment. As darkness is now beginning to fall over this majestic space, we are being ushered ever so gently into the season of light. This past Thursday the shortest day of the year passed quietly and without fanfare, all 8 hours, 46 minutes and 02 seconds of it.

The triumph of darkness faded once more into the past. This night is a study of contrasts- between what is and what ought to be, between all that for which we long and that which we already have. Tonight, we usher in the season of light and hope, the darkness having been conquered, not by the passing of the solstice, but by the

birth of our Savior in the humblest of surroundings. Jesus Christ is seen as the summit of both sacred and secular history.

The Church marks with precision that our salvation has come in the form of an innocent baby, born when, the “whole world being at Peace,” Jesus Christ, Son of the Eternal Father... “by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”

As our Lord was gently placed in the crèche tonight, we paused briefly in wonder and awe and incensed the crèche. St. Francis was blessed with remarkable insight into the human condition. He knew of our need to visualize so great a mystery, and Christians have followed suit for eight centuries, setting up their crèches, both at home and in Church. Whether you are six, sixteen or sixty-six, praying before the manger never loses its wonder. It is a moment both timeless and ever timely, in a world searching for meaning, too often in the wrong places.

It would fall to an early 6<sup>th</sup> century Scythian monk named Dionysius to begin computing the years, not from the founding of Rome, or the reign of an Emperor, but from the birth of Jesus Christ. From that moment forward, *Anno Domini* was born. It took us awhile, but eventually we got it right! All time finds its fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ. We gather with profound gratitude because God deigned to send a Savior into our time and place.

God has fulfillment His promises not only to the world, but to you and me, to our families. Our Savior came in time for each of us and for all of us. Our grateful glance towards God’s glory moves naturally tonight onto the Christ-child, in whom the Father’s glory was revealed to us.

This Christmas, he reaches his arms out in a gesture of invitation, the innocence of which cannot shield its magnitude. We rejoice because we have been counted among those upon whom God’s favors rests.

In faith and discipleship, we are invited to do the same, beginning in our own homes. Tonight, all of our struggles, disappointments and failures—these are all placed before the Crib, and laid there to rest, at least for now. For to us a Savior has been born in our midst, and He came to bring light to all the darkness of our lives.

The moment is here; there is no more waiting. Our mighty God ventured into the night of silence, a reverent silence, a profound simplicity, and he ventured there to find and save us. The Light of Divine Love has come into our world anew. May the joy and happiness of this moment resound in your hearts forever.