

The Nativity of the Lord – Christmas - At the Vigil Mass

December 24, 2018

*Everything Lines Up Perfectly*

Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Matthew 1:18-25

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel...”* It is always a privilege to celebrate the first Christmas Mass on the Eve of the glorious event in salvation history. Foretold by the prophets, we gather as the sun sets (4:35 p.m. to be exact) and as silence descends upon the stable.

In Isaiah’s day, the kings of Damascus and of Israel formed a coalition and sought to persuade King Ahaz of Judah to join them against Assyria. Ahaz was fearful because he believed the enemy was too powerful, deciding instead to join forces with Assyria. You know the saying– “If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!” But this would mean disaster for Judah, as they would end up sacrificing their faith.

Isaiah is saying- “Whom do you trust more, a king or the Lord?” He told Ahaz that he should rely on faith, not on power or political calculation. This is equally valid advice today. We are not to find our lasting strength in political leaders, in governments, even though they can be very effective and even at times altruistic.

No, we rely ultimately on God, and Him alone. Amazingly, the Lord invites King Ahaz to ask for a sign and we Christians see in the answer one important piece of the puzzle the foreshadowing of the birth of Jesus.

On Aventine Hill, the most peaceful of Rome’s ancient seven hills, sits a famous door. Actually, it’s not the door that’s famous; rather, it’s a keyhole. Those who make their way to the tiny Piazza dei Cavalieri di Malta are rewarded with a spectacular view of Saint Peter’s Basilica upon finding the right gate and peering through the hole. It is the one place where everything lines up perfectly. A foot to the left or right would not have same dramatic effect.

To my thinking, that is a good comparison of how God’s Providence works in history. Everything lined up perfectly. The Angel Gabriel’s visit made possible Mary’s “Fiat,” her Yes to God’s plan. Though done for

worldly reasons including for taxation, the census of Caesar Augustus had the effect of bringing Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, just as foretold through the prophet Micah, as we heard this past Sunday.

In its own way, these key moments coalesced, resulting in the birth of our Savior. But everything had to line up perfectly. And for once, it did! The monarchy failed, the tribes scattered, the prophets foretold a day of redemption, a day when the light would finally scatter the darkness.

We have waited patiently throughout Advent for the birth of our Savior. The pieces of the puzzle were carefully prepared from all eternity. Like Ahaz, we are told not to fear. Like Mary, we are told to request. Like Joseph was told not to fear taking Mary as his wife. The constant in all this is the absence of fear and it's replacement with trust.

We have many reasons we could put forth for fear: our society, world geopolitics, marital challenges, certainly the serious problems in the Church. They may all be legitimate, and yet on this day, we are being asked to cast them aside. We are invited to marvel and wonder at God's magnificent love for His people. Let us lay our fear at the Creche and Adore.

He has sent us Emmanuel, meaning, "God is with us." God is with us in the person of a tiny baby, Jesus. Two hundred years ago tonight, a parish priest invited his Church organist to set his six-stanza poem entitled *Stille Nacht* to music. Everything has lined up perfectly- who says priests can't get along with Church musicians! and for many, it is their favorite hymn of all. We will sing it towards the end of this Mass.

Indeed, on this Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright. Our Savior has cast aside all fear. Come, let us adore.