

CHRISTMAS HOMILY

1. Today is about an act of faith
 - a. Believe that Savior has been born
 - i. a child born 2000 years ago has changed world
 - b. Skeptics and unbelievers easily point out darkness of world has not disappeared
 - i. Still wars, violence, hunger and poverty
 - c. Even though every religion proclaims peace, yet so many wars in name of religion
2. For much of the world this is simply the winter solstice: a secular holiday of gift exchange
 - a. Before Christianity that is all there was. Parties and gift giving
 - b. Not a bad thing, but does not have a lot of meaning, a break in the tedium of life
3. Early Christians saw these pagan celebrations as teachable moments
 - a. The celebration of exchanging gifts teaches us about God
 - b. Our desire to give gifts is an image of the gift that God wants to give us
 - c. In Jesus He is giving us His very self
 - d. He becomes one of us to invite us to become one with God
4. Unique aspect of Christmas is a season of hope, not optimism
 - a. Optimism is a Pollyannaish idea that things will surely get better if we wait long enough
 - i. Winter solstice celebrations are about the days getting longer, light will come back
 - b. Danger of optimism is can be too idealistic about Christmas,
 - i. Idealism risks becoming cynical as see continuing power and force of anger and fear
 - c. Christmas not just about romantic images
 - i. Reason Jesus is born in a stable because his parents were immigrants
 - ii. Bethlehem was home of ancestors not Joseph. He did not have enough money to get a room in the inn
 - iii. Only the powerless like shepherds and foreigner realize that God is present in Jesus
 - iv. Sense of danger around Jesus, just the hint that he might be a future rival to Herod led to massacre of Holy Innocents and the Holy Family having to flee to Egypt
 - v. Story of Jesus life involves followers misunderstanding his message. Looking for power and influence
 - vi. Ultimately the people of power the Romans, the chief priests, Herod son of the original conspire to have Jesus executed as a common criminal
5. When think of Jesus life at first might wonder why do we remember him, he looks like a failure
 - a. Mystery of Jesus is that despite the power of evil, Jesus conquered its ultimate penalty death
 - i. In the resurrection of Jesus God really has changed world

- ii. He has given us the freedom of knowing that in Jesus nothing can ultimately harm us
- 6. This hope may be even more important today than often has been
 - a. Listening News can be frightening, remind us that humanity still needs to be redeemed
 - b. There still are the powerless who struggle with hunger
 - c. There are massacres of innocents such as children or volunteer health workers in Pakistan
 - d. The fears of terrorism and dangers of world feeling resentment at those appearing better off
- 7. Hope as Christians is that we given power of the Holy Spirit to do Jesus work
 - a. We gather together to remember that God has entered this world
 - b. He is using us bring the message of hope to world
 - c. Even though there is suffering and oppression in the world, with God we can make a difference
 - i. Gift of Faith given to us in Christmas calls us to look beyond the power of evil
- 8. Christian hope differs from optimism is that it does not believe world will get better by itself
 - a. Rather it believes that just like Christmas God will do the impossible
 - b. Just as he became human in Jesus
 - c. So he will use us to bring light and life into the darkness of the world around us
 - d. Light will not come without a struggle, we may even appear to be losing the battle for goodness
 - e. Our faith reassures us, if we look with the eyes of God we will see that his love is truly dawning in the world
 - f. even as the world struggles with the power of evil, By our work it is becoming a holier place