

Homily **Christmas** (25.12.18)

Gaze upon the Crib.

Behold the wonder of God become man for us.

‘The Word was made flesh, and lived among us’

Venite adoremus Dominum!

Many years ago, in another parish, we had an advent service, and the organisers and I thought it was really good to have a live crib. And we had a young teenage girl, I think she was only about 13, dressed as Mary, and one of the mothers of the parish hired out her baby, so we could have a Jesus... A real, live crib. At one point, we started to singing ‘Away in a Manger’. And I think it's the third verse, and we started singing.

"The cattle are lowing. The baby awakes, but the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes."

And the child burst into screams and tears, and everybody laughed. It was so beautiful. But the real magic was the mother who, very gently and not with any fuss, shot to the side of the little young girl and comforted her child with her. And the child went totally silent in the security and sureness of the presence of his mother.

And to me, that really... It hit me. It's never left me, this memory; the mystery of Christmas. The wonder and awe we all felt watching a real mother, with a real baby. And it was a truth that you don't often get expressed, the truth of love, and it showed us God's love in a more the vivid way in the birth of Jesus, the Word made flesh. Now, as the gospel said, the world did not accept him, and there are other voices shouting at us and screaming at us like that baby in the world. And because we are part of the world and we interact were the world, we so easily lose the mystery, I think. The worldly wisdom answers the crib, but with very limited and specific values, and we hear them constantly. They're not always malicious. Sometimes they are, but they're often scientific, and we're tempted to believe no deeper than that discipline tells us.

So if you had some imaginary visitors to the crib, and I'm not getting at a scientist or anybody of a scientific bent here, I'm talking about the atheistic side of these. If we had a visitor to the crib, a psychologist, he probably would tell us,

"This is a natural instinct of a mother-child relationship, and these early years are the most important for bonding and development of the child and this child is no different"

Very true. If a sociologist visited the crib, he might say, or she might say,

"It's part of the societal structure of humanity,"  
that bonding leads to a small community which builds other communities through the inter-linking of humans. Anthropology, or an anthropologist visiting the crib, would probably say,

"Well, this is just a natural instinct of all the animal kingdom. We share this with most of the animals."

And if a pathologist turned up, he might cut up the baby, chop it into pieces, show us all the nerves and the bone structures and DNA, and tell us how it works. And that would be true too, wouldn't it? It's a truth.

And all of these visitors, they do tell us truths, truths that are facts or pretty decent theories, but of limited vision to their discipline. And we are tempted to go away believing science and rational thought has told us everything, everything we need to know, but at a cost: The loss of mystery.

"What a piece of work is a man," says Hamlet in Shakespeare's play.  
'What a piece of work is a man. How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable. In action, how like an angel. In apprehension how like a God. The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals.' Now, that is the language of revelation.

A mother will carry a baby in their womb for nine months and then eventually hold their newborn at birth. They know this Revelation. For them, their unique newborn is noble, infinite, express, admirable, an angel, a god, a beauty is born, a paragon of all living things. Indeed, we would call it a miracle. It's not just a group of babies. Each baby is unique in this. I say mothers, but parents experience this. Mothers, in particular, but parents experience this because

there's something greater than the two of them here. And that is what a miracle is; something that is greater than us.

So revelation, I would suggest, is the real visitor to the crib. After all the 'ologies' of our modern world have had their limited saying, it is revelation that lets us see the real miracle of a baby. And if we listen to revelation, revealing each newborn with wonder or a mystery, then it's not that big a jump to see the miracle of God made man in the crib, if we can see the miracle of an individual baby. Because revelation, the Word made flesh, the real visitor to the crib, shows us that miracles are real, and the real miracle of God is the truth revealed in the birth of Jesus Christ on Christmas Day.