



Father John Hibbard

# Liturgy

## The Spirit of Christmas

What is it that we celebrate at Christmas? As Christians, we understand it is the birth of Christ. But what does that mean?

Are we reflecting on an event that happened over two thousand years ago? Is it like the birthday that each of us celebrates or tries to forget?

Our celebration at Christmas involves these, but it is much more.

### The mystery of our faith

If we look at the prayers of the Mass on Christmas, we can see that we are celebrating the Incarnation of Christ. This means two things: first, we recognize that the eternal Son of God took on human flesh; but we also recognize that this means that Christ now shares His life with us as He shares our humanity. This means that in the mystery of the Incarnation, Christ shares his divinity with human beings. This is a bold statement to make. That is why our joy is so great at Christmas, because, in taking on human flesh, Christ shares his own nature with us. Through Christ we also share in the life in the Trinity. For as Christ is one with the Father and the Spirit, so our union with Christ makes us one with the Father and the Spirit. The liturgy refers to this as the exchange of gifts. The wonder of Christmas is that we do not deserve this gift from God. In fact, many Christians may find it unbelievable or blasphemous to think, let alone say that we share in God's divinity. But this is the reality and mystery of our faith.

Let us look at three of the prayers of the Christmas season that help us understand the mystery and won-

der of Christmas.

1) The Prayer over the Offerings of the Christmas Night Mass says:

*May the oblation of this day's feast be pleasing to you, O Lord, we pray, that through this most holy exchange we may be found in the likeness of Christ, in whom our nature is united to you.*

This prayer refers to the solidarity that results from the mystery of the Incarnation: Christ, by taking on our human nature, forges a union between God and humanity. This reconciliation is not only the forgiveness of humanity's sins, but the complete union of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ. Because of this union, all humanity, in union with Christ, can benefit from Christ's Incarnation.

2) This is expressed in different words in the Collect Prayer of Christmas Day.

*O God, who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and still more wonderfully restored it, grant, we pray, that we may share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.*

This prayer takes us back to the gift of creation. It refers to the great dignity God gave us when He created us in His own image and likeness. This dignity was lost by Adam's sin. Now, in Christ, God has not only restored that original dignity of human nature but also gives us a share in divine life through the divinity of Christ.

3) The Preface of Christmas 3 again refers to the exchange of gifts that motivates our own gift-giving.

*For through him the holy exchange that restores our life has shone forth today in splendour: when our frailty is assumed by your Word not only does human mortality receive unending honour but by this wondrous union we, too, are made eternal.*

The Preface refers not only to the gift of divinity that Christ bestows on us; it refers to the gift of eternity or immortality that is promised us in Baptism. This prayer also refers to the supreme sacrifice of Christ who assumed our sinfulness, which the prayer refers to as "our frailty." Christ bears our frailty as Isaiah had prophesied, in order that we may be freed from eternal death and the consequences of sin.

### Christ is alive among us

When we celebrate a birthday, we look to the past and recall the events that have formed us into the person we are. Thus, to celebrate a birthday is also to celebrate the present as a living reality. It is the same with Jesus. His birth occurred more than two thousand years ago, but He is still alive among us and living in His Church through the Holy Spirit. His Birth has brought us God's love and makes the invisible God present among us in flesh and blood. To celebrate Christmas is not just to remember His birth; it is to celebrate His saving action now. So Christmas is not just about the past; it is about Jesus living in us and among His people. In the celebration of Christmas we open our hearts and lives to Christ that He may continue His saving work among us in the Eucharist and in our families. For this we give thanks to God.

## My Role as Church Organist

By Brian J. Lucy

Each Sunday during my ascent to the organ loft the consciousness of the Divine becomes overwhelming. From the first to the last notes played, I find no greater exhilaration in life than being a church organist. Since 1969, I've had the privilege to play the organ at St. John's Parish in Gananoque. Over the years, I've also been blessed with not only a fine musical instrument but a truly great choir.

My position as organist is not merely a job, it's a vocational commitment. I'm employed not to be an entertainer, the star of the show, but a facilitator who helps generate an atmosphere for worship. My primary role is that of leading the congregation in such a way that they are stimulated and encouraged to join fully into the musical life of the liturgy. Together, through music, I, as organist, and the congregation, as choir, form a team that complements and confirms each of our musical roles.

Being prepared for worship is not an option; it is essential. Preparedness involves scanning the readings and psalm, not just once, but many

times during the week to arrive at the sense required to choose the proper hymns and incidental music, organ or choral. This requires a committed prayer life with the ability to listen. Prayer and meditation become my greatest assets. In silent reflection, I listen not to what I want to hear but where the Holy Spirit leads. The congregation's musical response tells me whether or not I have listened correctly.

Over the years, I've come to realize, as Father preaches from the pulpit, that I also preach from the console. The music I select, choral as well as organ, must blend and fold into the liturgy, not stand apart from it. I've realized that the congregation should never be exposed to excessively loud organ or intrusive choral music. There's a time and place for such music, but it needs to be used sparingly. The choir's role is to join me in helping lead the congregational singing in such a way that those in the pews feel confident enough to join us in



Submitted photo

Brian Lucy, organist at St. John the Evangelist Parish, Gananoque

song. If the congregation is denied this inclusion in all aspects, Sunday's music becomes merely performance and worship suffers.

The congregation is not an audience to be entertained. I have the responsibility to see that they are able to join fully into the musical life of the liturgy and that their right supersedes all other forms of choral music. As organist, I must try to the best of my ability to find that balance which encourages, not discourages, prayer. The best feedback I can receive on Sunday morning is

none at all. I then realize I've fulfilled my role as an organist by adding to and not detracting from worship. I've fulfilled my commitment by seeing that God is praised.

As stated earlier, God invites me to a weekly renewal of service. He engages me, through prayer, to provide music that will stimulate and encourage others to join with me in that worship. This weekly invitation to serve allows Sunday Eucharist to be that special hour that makes my day, sustains my week, and changes my life.