



**Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Rapid City**

**Homily for Christmas Mass at Night
Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help**

December 24, 2017

Merry Christmas to all of you! But a special, warm welcome to all of our guests who have joined us tonight. I am grateful for your presence. What better place for us to be this night than right here, celebrating this GREAT mystery of the Father's love?

As we all know, Christmas can so easily be turned into a worldly celebration, and in many ways in our culture it has. What do I mean by that? Each year when Christmas comes around, it brings people together. Family members come from afar to be together and celebrate Christmas. Your kids come home from college. You host a big family dinner at your house. Gifts are exchanged. It is such a wonderful time of the year, as the song goes. And these things are important in the celebration of Christmas.

But as we all know, Christmas is much more than families getting together to celebrate a holiday. It is far much more than exchanging gifts with those we love. It is far more important than a few days away from work. Christmas is not only God's gift to the world, but it is God's personal gift to each and every one of us.

I love this season, not only for all the reasons I just mentioned, but because it brings me to reflect deeply on this personal gift from God – Jesus, God's Eternal Word becoming flesh; Emmanuel, God coming to dwell with us, seeking to enter into the lives of all people.

We can never forget the story or take it lightly – this true story – this miraculous story. It began in the creation story. *“God, in a plan of sheer goodness, freely created the human race so that we could share in his own blessed life.”* [CCC #1]

Then we broke God's heart through the disobedience of sin [parents, you know what it is like when your children break your heart through their disobedience] and eternal death entered the world. Throughout human history, every other path back to life and love was a dead-end. Humanity, in and of itself, cannot restore on its own what was lost, what was broken.

Then came the pinnacle of human history – God came into the world through poor parents, in the form of a poor, little infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, who was placed in a feeding trough for animals in a cold Bethlehem cave.

God, who was rich, became poor to restore what WE had broken through sin. We had broken a beautiful union of love. Small, weak, and helpless – that is how our Lord comes to us. Perhaps he has tricked the world. By making himself weak, in need of constant care and attention, God draws us towards him, restoring the relationship that was broken in the Garden of Eden.

And we still break God's heart through our disobedience, through our indifference, through our personal and corporate sin. But this why we celebrate Christmas each year.

When I realize how much I choose other things in life over God; when I realize how much I suffer through my own fault; when I think about how our world in shambles and peoples' lives are in shambles, reflecting on the miracle of Christmas brings life back into clear focus. This why we celebrate Christmas each year. Jesus desires to enter into our brokenness and the world's brokenness, so that he can bring His light into the darkness and transform us. We all have our own stories which speak to why this celebration of Christmas is so important for each of us if we take time to reflect.

“The great power of Christmas is about God's overpowering love for us – his reassurance to a troubled, frightened, war-torn world that he is with us, through everything. He dreams with us. He struggles with us. He grieves with us. And he hopes with us. Remember his name. Emmanuel. God is with us. Let us hear clearly the message of the angel to Mary at the Annunciation, and to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem: “Do not be afraid!” [Deacon Greg Kandra, Diocese of Brooklyn, New York, Christmas homily]

And we hear the words of St. Paul to Titus, speaking of this mystery and power of Christmas. “*The grace of God has appeared.*” [Titus 2:11]

The grace of Christmas! I believe that the real grace of Christmas is two-fold. First, the grace of Christmas builds each of us in holiness. It gives us a whole new identity. Our identity is bound up in this gift of Christmas. “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, he sent us a Savior.” [Romans 5:8] In this grace, we “share in the [very] divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” [Offertory prayer at Mass] No one is excluded from this message. No one is excluded from this gift.

It is a gift for the weak and the poor, the sick and the suffering; the saint and the sinner; the addicted and the marginalized; for everyone suffering physically, emotionally or spiritually. It is for everyone!

But this birth is only a moment in the unfolding of God's plan for both Christ and for us. For Christ, God's plan was taking on your sins and my sins, and the sins of all humanity in an ultimate act of love. The manger became the cross where eternal love was born into the world. For each of us God's plan will continue to unfold as we continue to accept the grace and the gift of Christmas.

Secondly, the grace of Christmas is meant to build up the Body of Christ, the Church. As we enter into the grace of Christmas, Jesus is born anew in our lives – a rebirth in our souls. As Mary carried Jesus in her womb and gave birth to salvation, we too must carry Jesus from our hearts and into the world as did Mary. Christ, who took on human flesh, must be made present through each one of us. We see ourselves as part of Christ's body, and are compelled, like the angel, to “proclaim this good news of great joy” through our words and actions. It is then the Christmas story comes alive and the miracle of Christmas becomes a true reality in our world.

How will each of us in this Christmas season and beyond carry Jesus from our hearts and into the world as did Mary? How will you, as part of Christ's body, “proclaim this good news of great joy” thus keeping the story of Christmas alive? In doing so, this will be the true miracle of Christmas.

I would like to conclude with a beautiful prayer from Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman which speaks to the real grace we receive in the miracle of Christmas. I have it taped to the mirror in my bathroom as a constant reminder.

Dear Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance wherever I go. Flood my soul with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly, that my life may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through me, and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel your presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus! Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine, so to shine as to be a light to others. The light, O Jesus, will be all from you; none of it will be mine. It will be you, shining on others through me. Let me thus praise you the way you love best, by shining on those around me. Let me preach you without preaching, not by words but by my example, by the catching force of the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to you. Amen.

May God bless you all and Merry Christmas.