



Where Christ is Born

Christmas Eve, 2019

Beloved in Christ,

This may be an odd way to begin a Christmas message, but if we're going to grasp what might happen with us over the next few days, I'd ask us to start with this:

What is the worst part of your life right now?

Please don't run away from the question. And the first answer is always the best. Is it your job? Your marriage? The child who worries you sick? Is it your next paycheck, or your last paycheck, or the fact that you have no paycheck? Is it the health of your body, or the health of your soul? Is it something else, perhaps in the community where you live or in our country as a whole?



Pick one. Consider it. Let it wash over you, whatever "it" is, whether urgency or despair, anxiety or regret. Stay with it.

See that? That is where Christ is born.

I am serious. There is no other reason for God becoming human, than this: God loves you so greatly that He is willing — no, eager — to make His home in your darkest place. Permanently.

All that you gave up on long ago, all that you stopped hoping for — that is His manger. With the first beating of His heart, the Lord Jesus began to take all this into His Father's heart. From that moment, going back to the beginning of Creation and extending to the end of time, this Jesus of Nazareth — the Christ Child — has taken on the sin and grief of the world, one wound, one sorrow at a time.

Including all of yours. Every wound, every sin, every sorrow of yours.

He bore it — and bears it still — in His own body. He bore it in His earthly life. He bore it on the Cross. He bore it into His grave. He carried it into hell. And when He rose from the dead, He laid it at the feet of His Father.

If you believe this — or even if you begin to believe this, or even if you want to begin to believe this — the evidence is overwhelming: Christ has made you a new person — ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. You are not bound by the past. Your life is an open page. The only question is, how will you write upon it, now that you know a loving God is guiding your hand?

Will you begin with forgiveness? Or sobriety? Will you ask for the grace to let go of anger, or lust? Can you abandon the old defense that you are always the victim? Or can you leave behind your need to control everything and everyone? The Christ Child is the answer for each of these questions, and countless more. It is His gift to you, not on one day, but every day. And the end result is joy — joy for you and those about you. Joy in God's seeing you become the person He always knew you would become. Joy to the world.

So, if you are planning on going to church on Christmas, and especially if you are not, try making this prayer, this offering, at some point in the day.

Call to mind the place you hate to recall, and imagine that He is there, the Child, in all His power and innocence, His holiness and love. See the light that comes forth from Him, light that the darkness could not overcome, light that is now the beacon for you to follow. Ask for the grace to follow that light.

Then, follow. And be blessed. And be a blessing to others.

Faithfully, your bishop,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dorsey', with a small cross symbol to the left.

(The Right Reverend) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh



Image: Detail from wall painting at the Grotto of the Nativity in the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem