

From The Pastor

As excited as we can get in anticipation of Christmas and all it promises, we are equally ready after the first of the year to say, 'it is enough'. With all the activity of family, and presents, and dinners, Christmas cookies, candies and cheer of every kind, the time quickly comes to get back to normal.

If we have truly realized the reality of what we have celebrated, then we must also realize that it is a new 'normal'. What's new about it? Jesus, the Incarnate One. Jesus is a new reality, a living truth within us that cannot be put away, or left to the side of what we might consider our real lives. If we have truly celebrated Christmas, then Christ has been reborn in us and we are seeing and responding to life with a little more light.

Although the Christmas season is a short one, it is packed with meaning and purpose. It is a season that deserves and demands that we look beneath the surface and realize all that has been given to us. On the surface, we proclaim the birth of our Savior, born of the Virgin Mary. The birth of Jesus inspires hope and promise. It stirs us with a liberating freedom when we realize we can be free of our sins, find new peace and unity with God, and hope for the promise of heaven.

For all that the Christmas feast proclaims, it is still just the beginning of all that is to be. In its fullness, there is too much of a good thing to realize and take in all at once. Like all the cheer and festivity of the holidays, the spiritual truths of Christmas must be spread out over time so that we can take them in, each in their own power.

The Christmas season includes the birth of God in the human nature. The human and divine natures become one in Jesus. Looking below the surface one realizes that God is now one with all created things. The whole universe now is 'incarnated' with the divine presence. Christmas day is all about Incarnation: God becoming flesh and fully sharing our human nature.

Beyond the Incarnation, Christmas includes the revelation of the full divinity of Jesus. This is the feast of Epiphany that we celebrate today. In the truest sense, Epiphany celebrates the fullness of Christmas. Through the three wise men, Jesus is seen and proclaimed as the divine One, who is to be the Savior of all nations.

The Christmas season concludes with the feast of the Lord's baptism. The Baptism of the Lord is included in the season because it activates, or puts into action all that Jesus is to be, and do for us. Affirmed by the Father, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is the divine Son who will consecrate and 'baptize' the world to the Father. What is given to Jesus is given for us. If Jesus is the favored One of the Father, it is only to confirm that through Him, we too are the beloved ones of God.

As a whole, the liturgical year reveals and celebrates three movements of grace that transmit to us the divine life of God. The Christmas season conveys the light of God in Jesus. In Jesus birth, a new light is seen in the world. Through his death and Resurrection new life is revealed. On the feast of Pentecost, new love is given in the Holy Spirit. Light, life, love: all movements and actions of God that reveal and confirm His life in us, and our lives in Him.

Notice that the three wise men who travel to Jesus do so from an unmeasured, but a long distance from the east. This long distance represents that all are called, even from the farthest place, to seek and find truth in the Christ. Notice too, that these men are seekers. They have a burning desire to seek the meaning and purpose of life beyond themselves. Looking to the skies and studying the stars, tells us they seek the light of the divine. More than human, intellectual knowledge, the seekers study the heavens and are drawn to the truth and life they seek.

So what does all this mean to you and I today? It means that the Christmas season is not ending, but in the fullest sense is just beginning. However routine or mundane our lives get to be in a work-a-day world, we remain temples of divine light, life, and love. The feasts that we celebrate are living and active. They are not merely points of notice that recall to us important things of the past. They are living realities that make us who we are today as children of God. God's life in us and in the world is not yet complete. We are all still in process.

The Christmas season with its joy and promise is not a 'spiritual happy hour' to strengthen us for the journey. It reveals and celebrates the life of God within ourselves, and through us, to all others. As we celebrated last week on the feast of the Holy Family, each of our families is holy and called to convey the life of God to each other no matter how messy and 'unholy' it may look or feel. Holy is something you are in God. Holy is not something you earn or lose by personal merit or loss. When Jesus came into the world in the human nature, everything changed. Your life and mine have been inexhaustibly united to God in the

truth of the divine Christ. Now that the holidays of Christmas have passed, spend the next two weeks and really explore the best gift you received in the Birth of our Savior.

A very blessed and Happy New Year to you all,
Father John Esper