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Moderator, Bread of Life Community

December 24, 2001

Christmas Vigil

Readings:

Isaiah 62:1-5

Acts 13:16-17, 22-25

Matthew 1:1-25

Once again, Merry Christmas. You know, today as we celebrate the birth of Christ, well really we're still in Vigil. We don't have the full celebration till midnight tonight. But what we do is we talk about this Jesus who came to save us from our sins. And as I was praying about what to pray for, the reality came about that Christ was born so that we could be born again. You know, what Christmas is about is being born again. It's about having a new life. As you read that gospel, you know, you might have sat there and wondered, "Did I have to go through all those names? You know, Father, they really look like they were pronounced the right way. You just say it and no one knows the difference." But anyway, if you go to that, spend some time there in Matthew with me. This is page 1009 in the pew bibles – Matthew, Chapter One. Look at the history of Jesus Christ. You know, it was interesting, today I was out with somebody and I was talking about how his family every year goes to 5:00 or 5:30 mass at a particular parish. But, they spend the whole day at a particular bar. And so then, after they go up there and they are pretty drunk and they have a fine time and then they go out and do some more. And the same, like tonight, one of my favorite things to do is to go to midnight mass. So, tonight I'll go to the Cathedral. Now I do realize when I look out, there is a whole crew of them drunk. You know, because Christmas is something that everybody goes to mass on Christmas. Even the pagans go to mass on Christmas. Whoa, look at that. Then, the priest starts to preach and what do they do, they turn him right off. Boom. Ok, I'm here now shut up father, hurry up, get through because I want to go home and do some more stuff. Well, that's not what Christmas is about.

Christmas is about being reborn. It's about entering into this newness of life and see, that's why we read the whole history of the genealogy of Jesus is because what happens if you look in the past, Jesus had some pretty big history. They weren't all very good now, were they? You sit there and you go to Chapter One of Matthew and you look at some of these people. David there, remember David, he was an adulterer. He was a murderer. He could, some would say, would be a drunk. And Solomon, He liked to have his fun, too! He turned his back on God. He built temples to other gods – even though he built THE temple to Jerusalem to the god of Abraham. And yet, with all the wives, he got taken in by some of those wives and when his heart went away from God. And you go through here and you go through the harlot, the prostitutes that

Jesus had in his past. That in the whole history of Jesus Christ and his humanity, there was a lot there that wasn't very good.

And so too, in our lives, every one of us here, brings a lot to Christmas. We bring our pasts and when we bring our pasts, there's good, there's bad, there's happiness, there's sadness. And yet, we come and we go through the ritual of Christmas once a year, seeing if anything happens from Christmas, what kind of presents we'll buy. But it isn't a transforming reality for us. And yet, what Christmas is about is Jesus comes and says, "Listen, it doesn't matter where you've been. I know the pain. I know the joy. I know the sorrow. I know the sin. I know the holiness. I know it all!" There is nobody that knows us as much as the Lord, Jesus Christ. Nobody! That sin you did when you were all alone, that sin you're most ashamed of, that thing you hate in your life, Jesus was right there. And He never has stopped loving you. Never. But this Jesus Christ, born 2000 years ago tonight says to you, "I was born so you could be born again." Jesus Christ wants to offer you this Christmas the gift of a new life, the gift of a new beginning, the gift of a past that's gone, it doesn't matter where you've been; it only matters where you're going. This Jesus Christ was born that you might be born again. And to be born again is not just something like you hear in the Protestant churches when someone comes up to you and says, "Have you been born again?" It's the reality that God wants to enter into your life and be born into your life that He might live. That He might give you joy. That He might give you peace. That He might give you a new life and a new beginning. Wouldn't you love a new beginning? Wouldn't you love if everything started all over again? I sit there and I reflected on that a lot. Sometimes I just think, if I only had a new beginning, I could sit there and start off and everybody wouldn't know me as this way or that way. You know, and oh, you get a new beginning. And I get to do that every time I go into a parish to do a parish mission or any time I go to give a talk. These people have never met me before. And I get to have a new beginning. That's such a great thing. No one knows what kind of jerk I can be, huh? You know, again, it's a new beginning - every single time!

And yet, the Lord Jesus wants to really give us a true new beginning. Not just a new beginning for other people to see. But a new beginning in my heart where He truly becomes Lord; where He truly takes control. The key to this new beginning, though, is us. He never forces Himself on any of us. Never. He only invites us and He looks at you this Christmas and He says, "I have a great gift I want to give you. That gift is myself. I want to live within you. I want to transform your life so that Christmas just doesn't become one of these rituals we do once a year because all good people go to church on Christmas." He wants to live in your life so that everyday is Christmas, that everyday is new, that everyday brings you joy, that everyday brings you peace. You know, did you listen to that first reading? Again, if not, go there with me. Again in your pew bibles, it's on page 798. Or if you have your own bible, it is Chapter 62 of Isaiah, verses 1 and following. But again, this is what Jesus says to us. God, the creator of the universe says this to us. We can go down to verse 4, page 798 in your bibles. Verse 4, chapter 62, verse 4. "No more shall men call you forsaken or your land desolate." Have you ever felt forsaken or your land desolate? I talked about; I was listening to Assembly of God. Yeah, I watch them every once in awhile. The pastor up there used one of our people, Soren Kirkegard. Did you ever hear of Soren Kirkegard? He was a great Christian theologian. And one night he was at a party and he was the life of the party. He came home and he was writing says, "This night at the party, I was the life of the party." Everybody who was asked would say, "Soren was the life of

the party.” He created the most jokes. The attention was on him. But when he went home, none of them saw him go and take a gun and place it in his mouth and contemplate blowing his brains out. Thought at the party, he looked like the man of great joy, the man of great fun, the man that everything was wonderful. At home, alone, he was a man of silent desperation.

And sometimes, we too, are people of silent desperation. And yet, Jesus breaks through that and He says, “Listen, I have something better for you. I want to be born in your life. I don’t want you to just go through the motions of being a follower of me. I want to live in you!” And then, this is what He says about us when He does this. In verse 4, “No more shall you be called forsaken or your land desolate, but now you shall be called my delight and your land my espoused. For the Lord delights in you and makes your land His spouse.” The Lord isn’t out to get us. He isn’t disappointed at us. He’s not angry with us. He delights in us. He rejoices in us. He loves us. And this Christmas, He asks you and me again, “May I be born in your life for real? May this Christmas be the Christmas where you are born again forever!”

Today, after Communion, we’ll give you the opportunity for that – to allow yourself to begin anew in Jesus Christ. And let me tell you something, if you’ve never done it before or if you’ve done it everyday. Everyday the first thing I do is before my feet hit the floor, my knees hit the floor and I say, “Jesus, I love you and I give you my life.” Everyday I have to commit or recommit my life to the Lord, Jesus Christ. Everyday He has to be born again in me. If you’ve never fully done that, tonight, Jesus invites you. He does more than invite you. This Babe in Bethlehem begs you, “Let me be born in your heart this night that you might be born again forever.” Let this Christmas be a new beginning for you. For the old life in the past has gone and the new life and a future full of hope begins. The God of the universe this Christmas invites you to receive the greatest of all gifts – Himself. Will you receive this gift, this night or will you walk away? It’s always your choice. Merry Christmas.