

**CATHOLIC PARISHES OF BROCKENHURST,
LYMINGTON & MILFORD-ON-SEA**

Christmas Eve / Christmas Day, 24th/25th December 2017

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Registered Charity No. 246871/2

A BIG THANKYOU: from Fr David & his housekeeper, Linda for all the prayers, cards & kind gifts from everyone at this Christmas time.

AN EVEN BIGGER THANKYOU: From Fr David: a big thankyou to all parishioners in all three parishes: to carers at home; to the sick & housebound who offer up their prayer; to those quietly living a good Christian life; to those who faithfully participate in the Mass; to those who pray for the clergy & the other parishioners; to those who generously support the parish by their financial contributions; to those who are there to lend a helping hand; to those who clean & tidy up; to those who look after the plants & flowers; to those who serve refreshments & meals; to those who prepare beautiful floral and scenic displays; to those who welcome people into our churches, to those who sing & play musical instruments; to those who serve at Mass & take care of altar servers; to those who act as sacristans; to those who clean, iron & mend the church linen, to those who proclaim God's word; to those who administered Holy Communion in the Liturgy and to the housebound; to those who prepare and present liturgies of prayer, reflection and celebration; to those who prepare our young people for the Sacraments & organise childrens' liturgy; to those who support fellow parishioners through friendship and care; to those giving support to one another in the CWL, the Catenians and the SVP, to those who serve on the pastoral councils, finance committees and social committees; to those who help with building maintenance; to fire wardens and safeguarders, to those who build fellowship with other Christians; to those who take the Gospel to others by word & deed; to those who help in the Foodbank; to all the paid staff in the parishes; to all our active & retired clergy, priests & deacons for very generous help & support. May God bless you all abundantly.

THE CHRISTMAS OFFERING: As usual the collection at Christmas time is a voluntary contribution towards your parish priest's annual income. Whatever you are able to give your generosity is greatly appreciated.

CRIB OFFERINGS: This year, with the encouragement of Bishop Philip, our parish will be donating crib offerings to the **Friends of the Holy Land**. Every penny will help the poorest Christian families, especially in and around Bethlehem, the West Bank, Gaza and Israel, with education, employment, health and housing costs and initiatives. FHL is non-political and ecumenical. For further information, please take a leaflet by the crib and keep our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land in your prayers at this time.

A Christmas gift from the Bishop! Thanks to a generous donor, this Christmas the Bishop wants to give everyone (all adults and young people) coming to Mass on Christmas Day a copy of Matthew Kelly's best-selling book, **Rediscover Jesus**. He hopes you enjoy it. Please make sure you collect your copy on the day!"

THE BIRTH OF LIGHT IN A WORLD BORN OF LIGHT

Do we see Jesus as a bright star falling down to a dark, alienated world? Or do we see Jesus as a bright light in a world born from the same light? The prologue of John's Gospel helps us see that the world owes its existence to the Word (the Mind, Plan, Blueprint) of God. This Word of God gives being and light to all (John 1:3-4).

So Jesus is not one who reveals to us that we are all darkness, but rather one who reveals to us that we are created "very good" (Genesis 1:31) by God who "is love" (1 John). The only place there is darkness is where the light has not yet shone, "but everything exposed by the light becomes visible – and everything that is illuminated becomes light" Ephesians 5:13).

The experience of Jesus for those who got to know him was that he was an astonishing human being who revealed the deep potential of humanity for goodness, compassion and love transcending every barrier of convention, status, race or circumstance. But more than this, those who got to know Jesus experienced through him a connection with the Divine. They experienced his union with God his "Abba, Father" and the power of God's grace working through him. They experienced his gift of self in love, "no greater love ...than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). They came to believe that this was nothing less than the expression of God's own love for the whole of humanity. Jesus was wholly given and gave himself wholly to the service of this love. Ultimately he came as a gift from God and he returned to the Source, the Father from whom he came, (John 20:17).

He came to bring the light which reveals that we, too, are all sons and daughters of God. The Divine spark, the Spirit, is with us all drawing us towards the light. The more we live by this truth the more we come into the light, (John 3:21). Our darkness is the separation, the alienation, the fragmentation of our lives that does not know its true origin in the Word, the Mind, the Plan or Blueprint of God.

We can look at ourselves, and indeed anything created thing, and say this is God in the finite form of me, in the form of the least of my brothers of sisters, (Matt 25:40), in the form of this dog, in the form of this tree. God is the whole of me but I am not the whole of God. So we can look at Jesus and say this is God in the form of Jesus. The one crucial difference is that we can also say by faith: this Jesus is in the "form of God", (Philippians 2:6). By God's gift we are already God in form of us, by God's gift & grace we are also called, in Christ, to be human beings in the form of God. "And we all, who contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit", (2 Corinthians 3:18). (DMA)

Read the following poem by
*John of the Cross aloud
slowly, meditatively, resting in
the awareness of Presence
within your own soul's womb.*

**If
you want
the Virgin will come walking
down the road
pregnant with the holy
and say,
"I need shelter for the night,
please take me inside your
heart,
my time is so close."**

**Then, under the roof of your
soul, you will witness the
sublime
intimacy, the divine, the
Christ
taking birth
forever,
as she grasps your hand for
help, for each of us
is the midwife of God, each
of us.**

**Yes there, under the dome of
your being does creation
come into existence
externally, through your
womb, dear pilgrim—
the sacred womb of your
soul,
as God grasps our arms for
help; for each of us is
His beloved servant
never
far.**

**If you want, the Virgin will
come walking
down the street pregnant
with Light and
sing**

¶*If You Want* · by St. John of
the Cross, translated by
Daniel Ladinsky,
*Love Poems from God: Twelve
Sacred Voices from the East
and West*



**A Christmas Thought to You
from the SVP**

**We give no gifts at Christmas,
We give them all the year through,
We give our love and friendship,
A gift we know is true.**

**It doesn't need posh wrapping.
It's there with little fuss,
We wish that we could give far more,
But there's only a few of us.**

**So everyone can have a share.
Whatever we can do,
To make life happier,
We'll do it all for you.**

**So when the cards and trimmings go,
And there's nothing left but dust,
The gift we gave at Christmas,
It's still here, it's us.**

**You won't break it, you won't lose it,
And wherever you may roam,
Our thoughts and love will always fit,
Some place inside your home.**

Happy Christmas to you and yours.

INCARNATION – GOD IS WITH US

For many of us, I suspect, it gets harder each year to capture the mood of Christmas. About the only thing that still warms are hearts are memories, memories of younger, more naïve, days when the lights and carols, Christmas trees and gifts, still excited us. But we're adult now and so too, it seems, is our world. Much of our joy in anticipating Christmas is blunted by many things, not least by the commercialism that today is characterized by excess. By late October we already see Christmas decorations, Santa is around in November, and December greets us with series of Christmas parties which exhaust us long before December 25th. So how can we rally some spirit for Christmas day?

It's not easy, and commercialism and excess are not our only obstacles. More serious are the times. Can we, amid the many cruelties of this year, warm up to a season of tinsel and festivity? Can we continue to romanticize the pilgrimage of one poor couple searching for shelter two thousand years ago amidst the plight of the millions of refugees today who are journeying without even a stable as a refuge? Does it mean anything to speak of peace after various elections this year polarized our nations and left millions unable to speak civilly to their neighbors? Where exactly is the peace and goodwill in our world today?

Closer to home, there are our own personal tragedies: the death of loved ones, lost marriages, lost families, lost health, lost jobs, lost time, tiredness, frustration. How do we celebrate the birth of a redeemer in a world which looks shockingly unredeemed and with hearts that mostly feel heavy and fatigued? The Christmas story is not easily made credible. How do we maintain the belief that God came down from heaven, took on human flesh, conquered all suffering, and altered the course of human history?

This isn't easy to believe amidst all the evidence that seems to contradict it, but its credibility is contingent upon it being properly understood. Christmas is not a magical event, a Cinderella story without midnight. Rather its very centre speaks of humiliation, pain, and forced fleeing which is not unlike that being experienced by millions of refugees and victims of injustice on our planet today. The Christmas story mirrors the struggle that's being experienced within our own world and within our own tired hearts. (cont/. below)

Incarnation is not yet the resurrection. Flesh in Jesus, as in us, is human, vulnerable, weak, incomplete, needy, painfully full of limit, suffering. Christmas celebrates Christ's birth into these things, not his removal of them. Christ redeems limit, evil, sin and pain. But they are not abolished. Given that truth, we can celebrate at Christ's birth without in any way denying or trivializing the real evil in our world and the real pain in our lives. Christmas is a challenge to celebrate while still in pain.

The incarnate God is called Emmanuel, a name which means God-is-with-us. That fact does not mean immediate festive joy. Our world remains wounded, and wars, strikes, selfishness, and bitterness linger. Our hearts too remain wounded. Pain lingers. For a Christian, just as for everyone else, there will be incompleteness, illness, death, senseless hurt, broken dreams, cold, hungry, lonely days of bitterness and a lifetime of inconsummation. Reality can be harsh and Christmas does not ask us to make make-believe. The incarnation does not promise heaven on earth. It promises heaven in heaven. Here, on earth, it promises us something else – God's presence in our lives. This presence redeems because knowing that God is with us is what ultimately empowers us to give up bitterness, to forgive, and to move beyond cynicism and bitterness. When God is with us then pain and happiness are not mutually exclusive and the agonies and riddles of life do not exclude deep meaning and deep joy.

In the words of Avery Dulles: "The incarnation does not provide us with a ladder by which to escape from the ambiguities of life and scale the heights of heaven. Rather, it enables us to burrow deep into the heart of planet earth and find it shimmering with divinity." George Orwell prophesied that our world would eventually be taken over by tyranny, torture, double-think, and a broken human spirit. To some extent this is true. We're a long ways from being whole and happy, still deeply in exile.

However, we need to celebrate Christmas 2016 heartily. Maybe we won't feel the same excitement we once felt as children when we were excited about tinsel, lights, Christmas carols, and special gifts and special food. Some of that excitement isn't available to us anymore. But something more important is still available, namely, the sense that God is with us in our lives, in our joys as well as in our shortcomings.

The word was made flesh. That's an incredible thing, something that should be celebrated with tinsel, lights, and songs of joy. If we understand Christmas, the carols will still flow naturally from our lips. (Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI 15th Dec 2016)