



CATHEDRAL *of the* INCARNATION

Christmas Eve—December 24th, 2017

God's Justice League

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Christmas Eve is a night set apart--in the darkness--to recall our Savior's birth in Bethlehem and to pray for his return in power and great glory.

In the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them." If we take him at his word, Jesus, who is the Christ - the very Son of the most high God, is here among us tonight.

God, who created the heavens and the earth, is born anew in you and me - right here and now, offering the fullness of God's promise of salvation: redemption, reconciliation and release to all who believe.

The mystery of God's Incarnation bears the promise of our sacred worth and causes us, by its power, to recognize the supreme value of every human being and of all creation.

Now - perhaps you didn't come to the Cathedral tonight prepared to stand face to face with the mystery of Christ's Incarnation. Maybe you were not ready to encounter the immortal, invisible, life-altering power of the

living God. Perchance you came because your parents or grandparents dragged you? Maybe you came to see the pretty decorations, or because you like nice singing and candles. We have all those things. Perhaps you came because it's a family tradition or it seemed like a good enough thing to do while waiting for the midnight showing of Justice League. That's all fine. I promise. Really, it is. But since we're all here, why not revel in the wonder of God's coming among us in great humility and quiet triumph.

Isaiah says it best:

“Fueled by his restored faith in humanity and inspired by Superman's selfless act, Batman and his new ally Wonder Woman recruit Aquaman, Cyborg and the Flash to help them save the planet from a newly awakened enemy.”

Oh no, I'm sorry - that's the synopsis of Justice League, now in theaters. It's not The Greatest Story Ever Told, but it does have certain prophetic qualities!

Isaiah, in fact, said, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined...”

Doesn't that brighten your spirit? Really! There is no dark place where God's light does not shine. Doesn't that cause your spine to unfurl just one or two vertebrae even if you've got a herniated a disk? Who doesn't get just a little taller and a little lighter when they hear this news?

“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.” Amen to that!

Tonight we celebrate what Christians have celebrated for millennia - that the Savior of the World comes to us in the most hopeful and magical form we know as human beings - that of a vulnerable child - a baby- full of grace and truth.

And that grace and truth - the promise of the Christ-child - grow into a reign of celestial peace and love not of this world. Peace and love passing human understanding. Peace and love that we know deep down in our souls we were made for. Peace and love that are our birthright and the potential of all people. Peace and love that we cannot cause to manifest in the world or in our lives by any power other than God’s grace.

A couple thousand years ago, a poor refugee couple fleeing persecution found a little place on the side of the road to deliver their Son, Emmanuel. We have come to call them the Holy Family. By the time he was 33, their Son redeemed the world by his sacrifice of unrelenting love. By God’s presence in Mary and Joseph and Christ Jesus, our eyes are opened to see every family and every person as holy and full of divine grace.

Your family and mine. You and me and everyone. Full of grace. As broken as we are. As sad, as lonely, as threatened, as frightened, as clueless, as selfish, as rude as we are. As unrepentant. As sick or as well as we are, we bear the very image of God. By His mighty arm, and by Mary’s grace and bravery, God has made it so. The power and hope and peace of God is in us

all: a fathomless potential for good that cannot be taken from us no matter what. We are God's Justice League, imbued with extra-terrestrial love-power from on high.

The ancients called this reality Divination or Theosis. Athanasius of Alexandria put it this way, "For Christ was made man that we might be made God." That is the truth - it's not fake news. Listen to it again, "Christ was made man that we might be made God." And if God is love - then, God became human in Jesus of Nazareth that we might all become love incarnate. That is why we live - for love - and to be God's love in the world.

Looking out from this pulpit tonight, I see love in you. I see the image of God in each of you. You are gleaming with the very brightness of the Lord. God is with us. Emmanuel.

Where two or three are gathered, God is born there. From Bethlehem to Brooklyn. From Bethpage to Burundi. From Brookhaven to Buenos Ares. From Bayville to Bilbao to Birmingham. From Bellport to Beijing to Biloxi to Belarus. The promise is fulfilled again tonight. God is born here and there, in this Cathedral dedicated to the Incarnation. On this island we call home. In the Palestinian territories and in Israel. Among farm workers and refugees. In expectant moms, retailers, bankers and prisoners. Travelers, seekers, rich and poor together. The word becomes flesh and dwells among us. And we behold his glory in every face - full of grace and truth.

As Eric Clapton once sang,

"You look wonderful tonight

The love light in your eyes

And the wonder of it all

Is that you just don't realize how much [God] love[s] you.”

He almost sang it just like that.

You are radiant tonight with the love of God in Jesus Christ. Let that light so shine before others, that they may see Christ in you and give glory to God in the highest heaven. AMEN.