

Christmas Day – 2008

J.A. Loftus, S.J.

For most of the other liturgies around this day (midnight and dawn), the Church draws upon the gentle and tender scenes that fairly whisper of Christmas. It is the utterly human drama that changes the whole world so quietly. These are the quiet stories that have captivated us—and especially our children and our own child-like hearts—for centuries.

But for Mass on Christmas Day, the Church brings out it's “big guns.” The beginning of John's gospel is one of the more abstract and yet succinct proclamations of the significance of this day in human history. It is written for the decidedly adult Christmas. The Word who exists before all time and space as God chooses to leap down from the metaphorical heavens and take on human flesh—just like ours. And as the Psalmist sings this morning: “All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.”

The marvel of the day lies not just in the tender picture of a baby cradled for the first time in his young parents arms. The marvel lies in the realization that our human longing for something divine today intersects with God's longing for the human. The Divine yearns for union with us as much, if not more, than we yearn for union with something Divine.

To borrow a phrase from the theologian James Alison, today is the

celebration of the fact that God not only loves us; God actually *likes* us. And God makes a choice to be with us in time and space, and with a human heart—with all its own human loves, and dreams, and expectations and hopes; and, yes, with all its despair, and fears, and longings. But through it all, God still likes us. That may be the hardest part of Christmas to truly celebrate.

Today is God's "Yes" to all created reality. That's what John's gospel really proclaims. And throughout history, only the poets have come close to expressing it. e.e. cummings, on this year's parish Christmas card offers one reflection. He suggests: "Love is a place & through this place of love move (with brightness of peace) all places. Yes is a world & in this world of yes live (skillfully curled) all worlds."

Christmas is God's "Yes." And Bethlehem becomes God's place from which all places unfurl. Today we really celebrate God's good taste in choosing to like, and yes love, us. For the rest of the day, when you say "Merry Christmas" to each other, think of *God's delight* in all those you greet. And may the season truly be a blessing for us all.