

THE PROMISE OF HOPE AND THE INCARNATION (J.F.M.H.- 6.12. 2018)

We don't know the number of years between the fall in the garden of Eden of our first, parents, and the birth of Our Lord in the Stable at Bethlehem, though there have been many guesses at the figure. Some have thought about 4000 years. By any reckoning it was a very long time, over twice as long as between the birth of Christ and the present day. One can speculate as to why God left it so long, before He redeemed mankind, and theologians have suggested answers. An all wise, and loving God knew what He was doing, and His reasons are no part of revelation. What we do know something about, is the magnitude of the preparations made for the event. A brief glance at some of these may help us in our own preparations for Christmas during the season of Advent. Because of the nature of the offence that had caused the fall; the pride, the disobedience, and the putting of oneself before God, it is not too surprising that the preparation period is full of direction and exhortation to counter these faults. Examples are the Commandments given to Moses, the history of the Jewish people, and the circumstances under which God the Son chose to be born, to live and die for us.

Immediately after the fall of our first parents, at the tempting of the serpent; God made a promise, giving hope to mankind that redemption was going to happen. He put enmity between the serpent and the woman, *"thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head and thou shall lie in wait for her heel.*" (Gen. 3. 15.) The devil was not going to have any power over this woman, but had to wait for her to crush its head. The devil would have had power over the woman if she had had any sin on her soul, so one can understand the reason why the Archangel Gabriel address her as "Hail, full of Grace". Our Lady fulfilled the promise exactly. She was, without stain of sin: (The "Immaculate Conception").

The prophets, one after the other, prepared mankind for the coming of the redeemer. The Old Testament writings tell of the gradual unfolding of Gods plan to send His Son down to save us. To Abraham God limited the coming Messiah to his seed (Gen. XXII. 18.), to Isaac and Jacob he fixed it to be from the tribe of Judah; later, from the descendants of David and Solomon, and this was repeated in all succeeding prophets. As the time drew nearer, all the particular circumstances of Christ's birth, life, death, and spiritual kingdom, the Church, are brought out. Even a sort of timetable of events was included. If you have never read it, the revelation to Daniel is an example of this. You will find it in Dan. IX. 21. ff. His famous 70 weeks of years from the time the Persian King Artaxerxes Longimanus ordered the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the Manifestation of the Messiah, (Christ's Baptism) and the start of His active ministry.

Even among the Gentiles the calculations had been made, and there was a longing for the great event that was to come. As we all know the 'Wise men' followed the Star predicted by Balaam (Numb. XXIV. 17) in the expectation of being led to the one who was to be born King of the Jews. That title was in fact hung over Christ's head as He died on the Cross. Today you will find it written on our crucifixes "I.N.R.I.", Jesu Nazarenum Rex Judaeorum, Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews. Hence, the wise men were able to get guidance from the well-read advisors of Herod, to go to Bethlehem. The shepherds not having that sort of learning available to them, had an even more dramatic guidance from an Angel, *'Behold I bring you tidings of great joy, for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign to you; you shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger.'* And suddenly there was, with the Angel, a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, *"Glory to God in the highest."* You know that the Shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Our Lady and St. Joseph with the baby just as they had been told. The Shepherds informed them of all that had happened. St. Luke ends the account of this incident with the rather telling phrase *"Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart"*.

The Church solemnly teaches that (1) God the Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, became Man; (2) that he was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary; (3) that He is True God and True Man. St. John put it very succinctly; "*The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us, full of Grace and Truth.*" If one believes that, without any doubts, the rest of the Catholic Faith falls into place. One can find an account of the teaching of the Church on the Incarnation in the Catechism of the Catholic Church 461-478. Our Lady gave birth to a child, a person, Jesus Christ who was and is the Second person of the Holy Trinity. That the Church believed this without ambiguity was demonstrated by the Title given to Our Lady, "Mother of God" at the Council of Ephesus in 431. It had been suggested that she was the Mother of the Human nature of Christ and not His Divine Nature, until it was pointed out by the Council Fathers that mothers gave birth to babies (persons) not to natures. Perhaps, because the role of Our Lady leads us to her Son, is the explanation of why when you are trying to look up what the Church says about Her, one has to go to the documents that describe Christ.



The members of the Tabernacle of Saint Francis

wish everyone a

“Holy and Joyful Christmas”.