

**Bethlehem**  
**A resource of Reflections for Meditation and Sharing**



*"By his birth in the poverty of Bethlehem, he wants to accompany each one of us on our life journey," Benedict XVI.*

Micah 5,1-4.

**But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; Whose origin is from of old, from ancient times.**

(Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne, And the rest of his brethren shall return to the children of Israel.)

He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD, his God; And they shall remain, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace.

**Christmas Highlights Dignity of Life, Says Pope**  
Contemplates the Holy Birth

VATICAN CITY, DEC. 24, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Christmas is a time to contemplate the value of human life, says Benedict XVI.

The Holy Father's comment was heard by thousands who had gathered today in St. Peter's Square to pray the Angelus.

"The birth of Christ helps us to be conscientious of what human life is worth, the life of each human being, from the first instant until natural death," the Pope said at midday from window of his study.

Reflecting on the mystery of Christmas, the Pontiff said: "In the God made man for us, we all feel loved, taken in, we discover that we are worthy and unique before the eyes of the Creator."

"To whomever opens their heart to this 'baby wrapped in swaddling clothes,' who lies 'in a manger,'" the Bishop of Rome said quoting the Gospel of Luke, "is offered the possibility of seeing with new eyes the reality of everyday."

"By his birth in the poverty of Bethlehem, he wants to accompany each one of us on our life journey," said Benedict XVI.

"In this world," added the Pope, "from the moment that he decided to make it his home, no one is a stranger."

"It is true, we are all here in passing, but it is Jesus who makes us feel as if we are at

home on this Earth, made holy by his presence. He asks us, nonetheless, to make is a hospitable home for all," said the Holy Father.

### ***BETHLEHEM:***

*From the writings of Bishop Giaquinta and others*

It is something immensely greater, it is an ineffable mystery, an inexpressible mystery of an infinity of love, that without any plausible motivation loves its creature, even when the creature estranges itself from that Love, and further—also here there is mystery beyond words—the majesty, the omnipotence of God comes in the midst of us taking to itself the weakness, the frailty, of a baby. Eternity that has no limits becomes part of time, our limited time: God who is above all that is passing, all that is transitory, becomes our history so that He can insert Himself in our history. And so He gives a response to the expectations, the needs, the intimate tragedy of man, and He gives not only a response of hope in general, but indeed, takes to Himself our nature, by which He makes Himself true man and, at the same time, consequently, man is elevated to the infinite height of divinity, by which we become adopted children of God in the measure of Christ our brother. And so for us a new dimension opens itself, the dimension of hope that means a return: no more just that eternity became time and history, but that time and history become eternity.

This is, in a few words, the "mystery of salvation", that is as much as to say the unfathomable mystery of the infinite love of God toward His creature. If then we go down to the details of how this incarnation of infinite love came about, and we enter into the poor cave at **Bethlehem**, then, I tell you, the proportions of the mystery become gigantic because we find ourselves before the divine condescension, that is. God who lowers Himself to the point of our poverty: the poverty of human maternity through the Madonna, the poverty of a cave, the poverty of an announcement to poor shepherds, the poverty of a baby who, does not know how to speak. This is the mystery of the love that we call 'the mystery of salvation'. (Christmas, 1996)



People want a lavish and comfortable house, but they do not willingly stay in it. This is the exact opposite of Jesus Who never had an extravagant home but loved it nonetheless. His home - - whether the cave of Bethlehem, the cottage of Nazareth, the villa of Lazarus, or the Upper Room - - was the center of unity and family intimacy in which all members love one another and the Father.

Using the family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as the prototype, every Christian family can live its spirituality fully by modeling the following virtues:

- Jesus' acceptance of the poverty of human nature;
- His hidden life in humble work;
- His welcome for all and hospitable goodness to those who wanted to see Him;

- His choice of perpetual availability to people through the Eucharist.  
(Family, A Community of Love)



Self-sacrifice to God in the spirit of the three vows demands an intense imitation of Jesus: chaste, poor, and obedient. One could have a distorted idea, though, if the picture does not include Jesus crucified. The divine Master's whole life expressed His death to self from the start, with its poverty of the Bethlehem cave to its conclusion with nakedness on the Cross. (Marriage or Consecration).

*Jesus, who agonizing on the cross, left to your faithful people your  
"I am thirsty" of love and sorrow, grant that I, too, may quench your  
tormented thirst.*

*I understand that your thirst is for souls and that for them you,  
Eternal Word, became flesh in the womb of the Immaculate Virgin and  
cried in the cave at Bethlehem  
(Prayers, GG "Let me quench your thirst).*

Bishop Giaquinta was a faithful and disciplined priest, attentive to living his priesthood fully in the footsteps of Christ. "A month before he became very ill, one day in Chapel he said, 'How I wish to live fully this experience: the poverty of the cave of Bethlehem, the charity of the Cenacle and of the Eucharist, and then this consuming of oneself to the point of giving my life for all on the cross.' He then added something very meaningful, 'Perhaps you have not noticed that the Crucifix we have in the Chapel is turned toward the window, not toward the inside of the Chapel...; what would have seemed a mistake is rather meaningful for us, because poverty, charity and consuming of oneself take us toward the world, that is outside the window, in that space of redemption that is humanity' " (Il Domani Ci Attende, p. 335-33). (Presentation on G.G. Franca Salvo)



That Savior awaited for centuries finally came down to earth. He became a man like us. He has answered our longings, our hopes. Finally we have a reason to rejoice and to hope, because among us has come the Eternal Word of God—the Word of God was made flesh and came to dwell among us. At the same time we see the response of humanity, symbolized in those three Magi, who accept the proposal of the divine, who come from afar, who prostrate themselves before that little Baby, who adore Him. It is a generous response, a response that knows how to suffer, a response that perhaps gives rise to a situation of mockery, misunderstanding, disrespect. How many in the far off Orient remained incredulous about that star. Those men, instead, few but courageous, generous, followed the light through their sacrifice, going through a profoundly disillusioning experience at Jerusalem, like that in Bethlehem—a city which doesn't know what is happening in its very midst, is sunk in its incredulity, is discomfited an instant, participating in their trouble to search for the Child but then falling back in its sleep of indifference. Notwithstanding their perfect understanding of Bethlehem's disbelief, it's

indifference, the Magi went on ahead, saw the light again, and arrived at where the Lord, the Christ, is, the little Baby. Also here, notwithstanding the humanly disappointing experience of finding only humbleness—a little baby, a young mother, and St. Joseph, they prostrate themselves (the interior light is stronger), they adore, they offer. Here we have the true meaning of Epiphany, this exchange of gifts. God offers faith, man accepts the faith with sacrifice and therefore gives himself. (Epiphany)



I understand that your thirst is for all people, and that for each one you, Eternal Word, became flesh in the womb of the Immaculate Virgin and cried in the cave at Bethlehem.

We have already spoken of Jesus' poverty and how He chose to be poor. We humans are conditioned by the course of human history; Jesus isn't – He is the Master of history; yet, He freely chooses the cave of Bethlehem and death on the cross. (Theology of the Cross)



Priestly wonders are not performed by a magic wand, but by a portentous word before which any human or divine power must fall. Whether you live alone in the woods, far from society, or are caught up in the turmoil of human dealings and hurry from one place to another: when you recollect yourself inwardly and, cloaked in your mantle of ceremonial vestments, whisper a word of mystery, by your lips a miracle happens and the Infant of Bethlehem is present under the appearance of the white Host. If a person comes close to you, even if weighed down, with the burden of a murder, and kneels in humility, you murmur a word and his sin is taken away and he becomes a new creature (Tomorrow's Priests).



These and many other incidents were kept in Mary's heart, who gradually comes to the awareness of her "fiat" and begins to see what lies ahead. She probably began to see it from the time of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, when she had to look for a corner where to give birth to her child – since "there was no room for them in the inn". Thus, the practical meaning of Mary's "fiat". As they flee to Egypt, Mary is probably asking herself, "what will our future be?" "When will we be able to return to our home?" And, then, once back home, what will the meaning of this life with the Son of God be? This Son who acts like anything except being the Son of God! I am sure that we would have asked him: "when you will be six or seven, will you please show us that you are the Son of God?" (1991 Eccomi Day of Prayer)



I think often of two nativity scenes at this time, that have great meaning for me. I loved Greccio. I loved the story of St. Francis and the child alive in his arms. This scene lives in my heart and has helped to create the image of a Grotto in my soul. I also love the stark poverty of Bethlehem with all its problems, evil, divisions...I think that God came into it all, the worst of all places and in continues to do so because he loves us, so very much. I know he has come into my stark poverty, a place of contradictions and he loves me so much (Teresa Monaghan).



Life with Christ does not alienate a person; rather, it opens her to a rapport with others, since our oblation avails itself – at any season of the year – to charity-service. This is our Advent and our waiting for Christmas; from this we shall know that God is coming, and that God is not tired of us. Christ, the awaited One, is coming. It is the wedding of Christ with humanity that begins at Bethlehem and finds completion on Calvary. All of us, Oblates, are invited to prepare ourselves to participate in the wedding feast with our lamps alight, ready to shed light on the festival. (Giuliana Spigone, 2001)



***Let us meditate on Mary who gives to the world Jesus, light of the world, in the grotto of Bethlehem.*** Mary begins to experience first hand the “emptiness of Christ” when he is born in absolute poverty in a stall.

***Let us pray:*** Holy Mother, we pray for deep spiritual lives that will help us understand the difficulties and sufferings of life.

