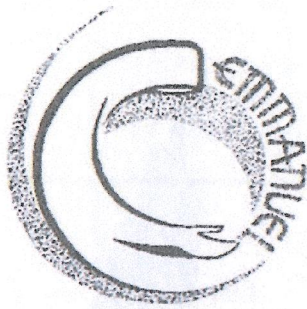


## The Feast is almost upon us!

How do you tell the Christmas story? As history? Certainly a child was born; certainly Caesar Augustus had a census. Or do you look at Christmas now—the Christmas trees and coloured lights, the presents, gifts and celebrations? The presents you don't want to buy, the relatives you don't want to see? We may wrap it any way we wish—but it is **The Incarnation!**

In the darkness of night tonight, Christmas Eve, we will be celebrating the *Word Made Flesh*. Our lives, usually filled with business, and deadlines, and other preoccupations, will be focussing on something deeper, something greater, something that is Hope and Liberation and Peace in a world which stands in such need of all these realities.

In the midst of dark and winter this evening many of us will leave our homes to gather for the Vigil Masses and then even later in the Cathedral Church as the Midnight hour approaches, not only to remember the past event of the Saviour's birth but to meet Him afresh, and feel the intensity of his presence in a new way. We will be helped in our meeting this *Word Made Flesh* with carols and poinsettias and a picturesque crib. But the reality will be something much deeper. As Isaiah will sing to us at all the Christmas Eve Masses: *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light....for the Prince of Peace is on his way. How can he be on his way?*



Well, as we hear this Sunday, he comes through the gracious acceptance of God's plan through the one whom the liturgy calls the *Lowly Virgin of Nazareth* who is exalted to become the Mother of the Redeemer. This woman brings Jesus into the world and fills the void of incompleteness with the presence of her Son. In so doing, she brings the prophecies of old to a wonderful completion. In her own flesh, she brings forth the one whose name means *God Saves*, the one who is Salvation and Hope for the whole human race. The Annunciation story is proclaimed this Sunday to enable us to accept and enjoy the role of Mary in God's unfolding drama of salvation: it is a lesson in *imitation* for us; we are to become like her, if we want to be truly happy. Real happiness, as she and countless

saints have known, is found in doing God's will. Even that very phrase, *doing God's will*, seems a little scary, somewhat outdated, not fashionable. Often though, the truth is not especially trendy, but facing it actually brings some relief and the possibility of new beginnings.

Our Catholic gatherings rarely centre solely on the Word of God in scripture, for we are, at root, a Sacramental People. We need food for the journey. As the psalmist sings, we need *bread for our toil and wine to cheer our heart*. And so we come to the altar, a table of plenty and a place of sacrifice. Even on days of great joy like the birthday of the Saviour, we raise our eyes to the Cross to see the evidence of Love's Endeavour and Love's Expense. The cost of saving us is great to Jesus. **The cost of love is always great.** CS Lewis reflects that *to love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken.* And yet we know it to be worth it. The joy of loving is worth the cost.

At Christmas we will affirm our loved ones with gifts — and with embraces and words of love, just as we have reached out and are reaching out to the poor and needy at home and abroad at this time of year. We find in them a *loved one* also, because Jesus resides in them, just as he resided among the poor when he came, being born poor himself, into the lives of a Mary and a Joseph and a wider family who were receptive to God's Word but still bewildered at the things being said about this child. Mary though, we know, *ponders these things and treasures them*. Jesus was born into a social poverty, yet into a family rich in faith.

**Today, too often, we are rich in the things of this world but really need to rediscover the richness of faith and share that bounty with our children to ensure they do not grow up spiritually poor.**

The Christ who is rich became poor for our sake and offers us his riches of love again this Christmas time.

**We only need to accept the Gift gratefully.**

