

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**Our days of preparation to celebrate Christmas are quickly coming to an end. For some, it is a frenzied rush of shopping, decorating, gift wrapping, baking, and cooking. For others, more than likely the elders among us, it is a calm, deliberative, remembrance of Christmases past. But all of us, one way or another, look forward with great anticipation to the celebration of Christmas.**

**If you would, let your imaginations take flight with me for a moment to ponder the preparation that took place for the very first Christmas more than 2,000 years ago. St. John gives us an inkling of how that first Christmas came to be in the prologue of his Gospel when he says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life; and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”**

**What we see here is God, Father and Son, wrapped in the ethereal presence of the Spirit of Love that binds them, looking down through the ages at all they have created. At first, it was all good, but after humanity’s fall in Eden, darkness enveloped the beauty of their creation. They send them judges and kings, priests and prophets to draw humanity back into the light of their love. All to no avail. People still chose to live in the darkness.**

**The Sacred Writer of our second reading this evening suggests a dialogue taking place between the Father and the Son before Christ came into the world. As people were struggling to find their way out of the darkness, they decided to offer gods of their own creation or the God of Abraham, Isaac and Moses all kinds of animal sacrifices and material offerings. I can imagine the Father looking at all that, shaking his head, and saying, “What do they think they’re doing”? Jesus responds as we hear tonight, “Sacrifices and offering you did not desire.” “Here, prepare a body for me”. He reiterates, “Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted in.” “Here I am, I come to do your will”. In this way God prepared for the First Christmas. Many centuries passed when the Holy Spirit was dispatched to a young girl in Nazareth named Mary so that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.”**

**After Mary gave her assent to the angel, Gabriel, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word,” our Gospel this evening tells us she “set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.”**

**First of all, isn't it interesting that Mary's assent, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word," reflects the word of the Son spoken to the Father, "Behold, I come to do your will"? What else could it be other than the Holy Spirit speaking through both?**

**Mary lived in Nazareth, a town west of the Sea of Galilee. Elizabeth lived in the hill country of Judah, between 80 and 100 miles away. Yet, Mary didn't turn to her parents; she didn't turn to her betrothed, Joseph. Rather, the Gospel tells us she "set out and traveled in haste", at least a four day journey, to Elizabeth. I suspect she did so since Gabriel mentioned Elizabeth and her pregnancy, and Mary wanted to see for herself as confirmation of what the angel had told her about what was happening to her. Now, Elizabeth had no way of knowing that Mary was coming. It isn't like they had cell phones back then. Elizabeth's greeting was her confirmation, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."**

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**God's preparation for that First Christmas began long, long before it ever came to pass. But that preparation was painstaking and planned down to the last detail. The prophet, Micah, who prophesized some 800 years before the birth of Christ, from whom we hear tonight that the birth would take place, not in mighty Jerusalem, but in the smallest, most backward place, "too small to be among the clans of Judah", a place called Bethlehem.**

**Considering, therefore, all that God did to prepare for the birth of His Son, it is indeed right for us to celebrate his birth with as much joy and festivity as we can muster as long as we realize that "we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**