

10. Mercy Takes Many Forms



GATHERING SPACE

What took place most singularly in the Virgin Mary also takes place within us, spiritually, when we receive the word of God with a good and sincere heart and put it into practice. It is as if God takes flesh within us; he comes to dwell in us, for he dwells in all who love him and keep his word. (Pope Francis)

Do you think Jesus' incarnation is simply a past event which has nothing to do with us personally? Believing in Jesus means giving him flesh, with the humility and courage of Mary, so that he can continue to dwell in our midst. It means giving him our hands to caress the little ones and the poor; our feet, to go forth and meet our brothers and sisters; our arms, to hold up the weak... our minds, to think and act in the light of the Gospel and especially to offer our hearts to love ... (Pope Francis)

- > In this painting Köder links the birth and death of Christ into the one event.
- > Both are acts of love, which transformed the world.
- > How do you see these events in your life?

FROM THE SCRIPTURES

The announcement of the birth of Jesus is according to Luke's Gospel, the song of angels delivered not to dignitaries or kings, but to shepherds sitting in the blackness with their flocks. This humble audience was terrified, but the story suggests that the Christ child has come for all, even the socially marginalised and isolated.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This

will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying 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 heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2: 8-20)

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING

- > During the Year of Mercy these prayers have focussed on aspects of mercy and its importance in the world.
- > What have you brought to birth in your life this year?

PRAYER

God of Love

Inspire us anew by the story of the birth of your son.

May we open our own lives to your indwelling love and recognise this love in the lives of all we meet.

Gift us with resilience and patience in our dealings with others

God of Bethlehem, be born anew in our hearts

Bless us with kindness and care in our day to day lives

God of Bethlehem, be born anew in our hearts

Make strong in us the passion for justice in our society

God of Bethlehem, be born anew in our hearts

Challenge us to live the mercy we have been given

God of Bethlehem, be born anew in our hearts

Instil in us understanding of your will for us

God of Bethlehem, be born anew in our hearts

Give us courage, as this Year of Mercy comes to an end, to keep open the doors of our hearts to the call to mercy and compassion in our lives

God of Bethlehem, be born anew in our hearts

(Pause for any special intentions)

FOR THE END OF THE MEETING

A BLESSING

Whenever we look into a crib this Christmas season

May we remember the call to give flesh to Christ's mission of love in the world.

Amid the busyness of family and friends

May the hospitality of our hearts expand.

If we glimpse our reflection in a mirror or pool

May we see an image of our God who is Mercy

When we feel the distance from people around the world

May the Christ child draw us into unity.

(adapted from Gilroy, O'Sullivan, Gallagher & Sippel)

“Why a Jubilee of Mercy? What does this mean?” the Pope asked pilgrims present in St. Peter's Square December 9, 2015 for his weekly general audience.

The answer, he said, is because “the Church needs this extraordinary moment. I'm not [just] saying ‘it's good,’ no! I'm saying: the Church needs it.” (Pope Francis)

HAS THE YEAR OF MERCY MADE A DIFFERENCE TO YOU?

Illustration from Sieger Köder 'Art and Inspiration'. Pope Francis: *The Church of Mercy* (2014), p152. Bible: Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition. Cath News Online December 11 2015. Gilroy, O'Sullivan, Gallagher & Sippel, *Act Walk Love* (2007) p49.

COMPASSION JUSTICE RESPECT HOPE



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