

## MESSAGE FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT, DECEMBER 18, 2022

### CHRISTMAS 2022

Christmas is a wonderful time of year. There are decorations, songs, gift-giving, and gatherings with loved ones. We have tried to make this season a light and happy one because there is the joy that God became man. God took flesh in order to bring us salvation.

But there is also a very serious side to the story of Christmas which we might overlook because we have sought to make this such a festive time of year. Christmas is more than a festive tale; it is also a very serious story.

The Bible tells us that Mary and Joseph are away from home when it was time for the baby to be born. They are not home in Nazareth but are in Bethlehem. They find a makeshift place where the baby could be born, with all of the struggles involved with that. Then, once the baby is born, shepherds arrive. We make the shepherds look nice in our nativity scenes but these were the guys who lived in the fields with animals. They were looked down upon and had a low reputation. Let us not dwell long on what they looked like or smelled like. I doubt that most of us would feel comfortable if one of them came and sat next to us in the pew.

And then a few days later, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple and Anna and Simeon told Mary that, because of this baby, a sword would pierce her heart.

Then men from some foreign country, probably not even speaking the language of Mary and Joseph, arrive bringing gifts. Mary and Joseph must have wondered what was happening.

Then the civil authorities tried to find out where Mary and Joseph were so they could kill their baby.

This is the story of struggles. We have made it a happy one because of the joy that God is bringing us salvation but we should not overlook the seriousness of the story.

In the midst of our celebration of Christmas may we not forget the serious message of Christmas for us personally. This baby in the manger came to die on the cross for us and will return again at the end of the world. The Lord will return not wrapped in swaddling clothes but wrapped in light as with a garment. He will not come to die on the cross, rather He will come accompanied by an army of angels. He will not come to be judged; He will come to judge. This baby is the Lord who will come again to establish His kingdom.

The serious message of Christmas is not merely that Jesus came into the world at Bethlehem, but that He comes to us now.

Each one of us will one day stand before this baby and whether or not we are welcomed into His kingdom depends on whether we welcome Him here and now.

man, about two or three days before he died, telling me that he realized that everything that he thought was important didn't mean a thing. I am glad he finally realized it but wouldn't it have been wonderful if he had realized it decades before?

The Lord came into the world in Bethlehem, but the Lord comes to us now. In the beauty of this holy season, let us remember the Lord wishes to come to us, change us, abide in us.

This is the serious message of this happy season. Good people, what is the point of placing the statue of Jesus in the manger scene if we don't place Him into our hearts?

May this Christmas be a grace filled time to truly welcome the Lord into our lives. May you and your loved ones have a merry and holy Christmas.

Sincerely in the Lord,

+Thomas J. Rodi  
Archbishop of Mobile