

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Each year, on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, it is my privilege to speak to you, the people of the Archdiocese of Mobile, and to wish you God's blessings as we prepare in a few days to celebrate that God became flesh in order to bring us salvation.

About 100 years ago a photographer named Wilson Bentley was the first to photograph snowflakes. This was not an easy thing to do with the technology of the time, but he was successful in sharing more than 5,000 pictures of snowflakes. One of the striking things about these photos is that no two snowflakes appeared to be the same. It became conventional wisdom that each snowflake is different.

About 30 years ago a scientist named Nancy Knight went up in a plane and studied snowflakes using a lab in the airplane. What she discovered is that snowflakes in the sky are all the same. They only become different as they descend to earth. What causes this? The winds at different elevations travel at different speeds, the temperatures are different in the different layers of the sky, the snowflakes get bounced around being shaken and bruised. By the time they get to earth and melt, each snowflake is unique.

We are all like snowflakes. When we are born we all start out pretty much all alike. But our differences in life, the bruising and the shaking we endure, our distinctive stories of life, make us all different. Every one of us becomes unique. Of the billions of people alive on the earth right now, not one is exactly like us, like you or like me. Of all the people who have ever lived or will ever live, not one has been or will be exactly like us.

We are a unique creation of God and God has a unique plan for each one of us. As the Prophet Jeremiah said God has plans for us and His plans are for our good.

God had a plan for Joseph. Joseph may not have felt he was special. However it came about, Joseph learned the trade of being a carpenter. He worked in business. He dealt with customers and probably some were difficult to deal with. He had a home. He was a good man, considerate of others, even wishing not to embarrass his betrothed wife when he found out she was pregnant before they had lived together. God's plan for him was that Joseph would be God's protector, provider and guardian. Joseph could not have anticipated any of that.

God had a plan for Mary. Mary may not have felt that she was special. She was a lowly insignificant young woman in an insignificant small Middle Eastern village of Nazareth. People would say about her village: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" God's plan for her was that she was to be His mother. It was from her that God would receive human flesh in her womb. She would feed God, bathe God, dress God, raise God. Mary could not have anticipated any of that.

God has a plan for each one of us, for you and for me. We may not feel that we are so special that God has an individual plan for each one of us. Yet God knows each of us by name. He knows how many hairs we have on our head.

His plan for us may not be apparent at this moment, but it unfolds in our life. It is a unique plan. It is a plan that is entrusted to us as surely as God's plan was entrusted to Joseph and to Mary. It is a plan no one else can fulfill. It is a plan we live out in the everyday moments of our lives. It is a plan to forgive others, to care about others, to encourage others, guide others. It is not only snowflakes which are unique, we are all unique and God has a distinctive plan for each of us.

Over the next days we may enjoy gatherings with family and friends. Then we will put away the decorations. We may keep wonderful memories of these days and being with loved ones or we may even say thank God Christmas is over. But the message of Christmas is not one that is ever over. The Christmas message is that God is with us. God did not become flesh merely to spend 33 years with us walking the earth. He came among us to remain with us. As Jesus promised: "I am with you until the end of time."

It is for us not only to remember Jesus was born in Bethlehem but to allow God to be born in us. To be truly alive, in us. To truly help us embrace His plan for us. To be the person He calls us to be. To truly guide us in our lives so that we live out the plan God has designed uniquely for us. Christ is born for us.

This week we will celebrate that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It is now for us to live our individual lives so that God can be born, not only for us, but in us.

I pray God blesses you and your loved ones and may you all have a merry and holy Christmas.

Thomas J. Rodi :
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