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Hi everybody. Greetings from our temporary new pastoral centre.

Each year in preparing to celebrate the Lord's birth, one of the greatest sources of inspiration comes from Advent and Christmas carols, so many of which have rich yet simple imagery to recount the extraordinary event of God, creator of all things, choosing to take flesh as one of us. Christmas carols are such a powerful way of wrapping our minds around the mystery of the Incarnation, often contrasting the creative and saving power of God with the humbleness of the nature, surroundings and circumstances of Jesus' birth. The heart of the nativity is so beautifully expressed in carols such as In the Bleak MidWinter, which began not as a carol but as a poem by Christina Rossetti.

The second verse begins by acknowledging the glory of God:

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain,
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign.

But then it turns to the reality of the Incarnation:

In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty —
Jesus Christ.

In the third verse, that contrast between the all-powerful and the poverty of his birth is beautifully set forth:

Enough for Him, whom cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom Angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

The carol goes on to draw us in, just as the Incarnation does. We are part of the story, and are invited in, in an intimate way, to ask what we can bring the Christ child:

What can I give Him,

Poor as I am? —
If I were a Shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man
I would do my part, —
Yet what I can I give Him, —
Give my heart.

This is what we celebrate at Christmas. A Creator who chooses the most extraordinary way to reveal a boundless love to his creation. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins uses a beautiful expression to speak of the Incarnation. He speaks of “God’s infinity dwindled to infancy,” who Mary welcomes “in womb and breast, birth, milk, and all the rest.” Infinity dwindled to infancy is what the Gospels speak of when they tell us of the Incarnate Word “wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12).

And this is God’s way of engaging with a wounded and struggling world. On his recent visit to Kazakhstan, Pope Francis reminded his hearers of God’s “response to the spread of evil in the world: he gave us Jesus, who drew near to us in a way we could never have imagined.”

In this Christmas season, we are invited to immerse ourselves in the joy and life that come from God’s drawing near, from God’s way of drawing near to us. We are invited to enter into the story, too. When God takes on human flesh, it is to our human home that God comes. The Incarnation tells us that God’s entry point into the world is not fundamentally through an exercise of power, though that is there - it is there in Creation, it is there at the Resurrection, it is there at Pentecost; but most fundamentally God’s entry point is revealed in the way he chose to come among us in the flesh, in the way he lived, in the way he died: in complete vulnerability, in poverty, entrusted to the Father, entrusted to us human beings.

And of course the challenge that comes with all of this is expressed concisely by Jesus when he says to his disciples, and to us, “go and do likewise.” During his visit to Canada, Pope Francis commented, “One cannot proclaim God in a way contrary to God himself. And yet, how many times has this happened in history! While God presents himself simply and quietly, we always have the temptation to impose him, and to impose ourselves in his name. It is the worldly temptation to make him come down from the cross and show himself with power.... Brothers and sisters, in the name of Jesus, may this never happen again in the Church.”

This Christmas let us allow the tenderness and mercy of God to soften our hearts, to touch our souls, so that we might dare to walk a little more as Jesus walked, to come into the lives of others as he came into ours. In humility, in vulnerability, exercising authority by placing ourselves at the service of others, honouring the dignity of each and every person we meet, knowing how deeply loved by God that each one of us is. For God has made a home with us, and walks with us in the tangle and turbulence of our lives. Christ is born, Christ dwells with us. Come let us adore him!

Merry Christmas!