



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



### **Mass of Christmas at Midnight December 25, 2004**

Today is born for you in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. \_ The proclamation of the angel to the shepherds, as we have just heard in the Gospel. Today is born for you . . . \_ Christmas is unique among all the days of the Church's year in that three different Masses are prescribed to be celebrated on it: first, a Mass at Midnight, second, a Mass at Dawn, third, a Mass during the fullness of the day. There are three Masses, because on this day the Church celebrates the three births of Christ; each Mass refers, although with differing emphases, to all three births. First, there is his eternal birth as Son proceeding from the Father in the splendors of the Most Holy Trinity; this is his birth as he who is true God. Then, there is his temporal birth as child coming forth from the womb of his Blessed Mother at Bethlehem; this is his birth as he who is also true Man. But there is a third birth of the Lord which we celebrate at Christmas, and that is his birth today, this very day, this holy night: his spiritual birth in his Church. Today, not two thousand years ago, not in the one Day of eternity, but today the Lord is born spiritually in the \_ city of David\_, that is, in his Church, and so the angel says that this birth is a great joy for all people, not just for the shepherds, not just for the people of Israel, but for all people, for the Church brings the Lord to all people, of all times and all places, brings him to them, and offers him to them.

Ours, then, is to receive him. How shall we receive him? First, by \_ believing on his name, as the Gospel for the Mass of Christmas Day says. Then, by receiving Baptism and Confirmation, \_ by the bath of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out upon us richly . . . \_ , as the Epistle for the Mass of Christmas at Dawn will say. Then, by receiving his very Body and Blood in the Most Holy Eucharist, as we shall have the ineffable privilege of doing, once again, in just a few moments, so that, as we shall say in the Prayer over the Gifts, \_ by our communion with God made man, we may become like him in whom our nature is united to you, O God.\_ Always, that we may worthily receive him in Holy Communion, we receive him by the regular use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in which he comes to us in his merciful love to forgive us our sins, for, as the angel says to Joseph in the Gospel for the Vigil Mass of Christmas, \_ You shall call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.\_ And then, finally, we stay in union with him by unceasing prayer, unceasing mindfulness of him: \_ Mary,\_ the Gospel for the Mass of Christmas at Dawn tells us, \_ Mary treasured all these things, and pondered them in her heart.\_

If we so receive the Lord at Christmas, what then? As we shall hear in the Gospel for the Mass of Christmas Day, \_ to all who receive him, he gives the power to become children of God.\_ Here is the unique grace of Christmas: just as the Son of God took from us a human nature to join it to his divine nature in



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the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, so, as it were in exchange, he joins a share in his divine nature to our human nature in the soul of each one who receives him at Christmas. Thus, each one who receives him at Christmas is made a true child of God, a true image of the only-begotten Son of God. This share in the divine nature was first given to us, indeed, at our Baptism, but if we receive Christ devoutly in the Masses of Christmas, then this share in the divine nature is renewed and deepened, and we are made more a child of God than ever before. The Fathers of the Church put it with extraordinary, even shocking, boldness: \_ The Word of God became Man, \_ they said, \_ the Word of God became Man that we might become God. \_

Now it is this, I say, which is the ground of the exceeding great joy of Christmas; this is why the angel said that he had tidings of great joy; this is why the one who is born is indeed the Savior of the world. It is not that he will order things in such a way that we do not have to suffer the trials and tribulations of this life; on the contrary, he said that if we follow him, we will suffer all these trials and tribulations, and more, precisely because we are his disciples. But he is our Savior because, in the midst of these trials and tribulations, he already gives us a share in his divinity, and a share, through repentance, in his pure and innocent human nature, and because he is leading us, through these trials and tribulations, to that perfect Day in the age to come when our humanity will have been completely purified, our share in his divinity will have come to its fullness, and will be wholly like him, for we shall see him as he is. In this age already, then, joy and peace, in the age to come unending bliss.

\_ Be not afraid, \_ says the angel to the shepherds. \_ Be not afraid, for I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be for all the people. \_ Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, glorifying and praising God. The shepherds too, when they had understood what had come to pass for them on this day, began to glorify and praise God. May we join our voices with theirs, and with those of the angelic beings whose form is glimpsed in the radiant night, whose song is heard upon its stillness:

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.