



Let there be Peace on earth

St. Helen's folk group, "Joy," shown above, sponsored a festival at Thanksgiving time that brought together young singers from 14 parishes. The keynote was sounded when "Joy" teamed with "Cold-water," the Holy Ghost group, to sing "Let peace begin with me." Also taking part in the festival were groups from St. Theodore's, St. Monica's, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Anthony's, Holy Apostles, St. John the Evangelist, St. Lawrence, St. Augustine's, St. Charles, St. Joseph's, St. Ambrose and Sacred Heart. Barbara Ann Brown was chairman.

Insights into Liturgy

Christmas: A Way of Talking about God

By Msgr. William H. Shannon

In recent years a number of theologians have given a great deal of attention to what they call "God-language." They have attempted to grapple with what has been a perennial theological problem through the ages, namely, how can man speak of God? What kind of language can we use to describe the Ultimate Reality? Some have given up the task as an impossible enterprise. Others have clung to the traditional way of describing God, namely, in the language of poetry.

We cannot define God. We can only use symbols drawn from our

finite experiences to speak about Him. So we call God Father, Shepherd, King, Rock, Stronghold. In a word, we use realities of our finite experience as windows whereby we look out through created things upon the Ultimate Reality that they dimly reflect. Yet we are deeply conscious that all our symbols fall far short of the Reality we are trying to describe. We understand the honesty of St. Thomas Aquinas who admitted that we know more what God is not than what He is. For we have no God-language, only human language. No word or words we utter will be adequate to express the height and depths of Him Who is the Holy One.

But when we gather for the Christmas Liturgy and celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation faith tells us that what our feebleness of language cannot do, God can do and has done. God has uttered a Word that does adequately express His own fullness, and that Word is Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh. Jesus Christ is God-language in the most literal sense of the term. Jesus is the answer to those who grapple with the question: How can we speak of God?

We can speak of God by saying: Jesus Christ. He is the one perfect human symbol of the Ultimate Reality. For in Jesus we come to know One who is fully man — and therefore within the realm of our experience, yet in Him dwells the fullness of divinity. The Incarnation makes it possible for us to see God, for we can see Him in Jesus Christ. St. Paul has a beautiful description of the Incarnation in Second Corinthians (4:6): he tells us that we see the glory of God shining in the face of Christ Jesus.

The moving message of the Christmas feast we celebrate is that God is human. Never again can God be for us an abstraction that we reason to or reason about. Never again can He be a God separate from man, distant and strange and non-human. Christmas rings out for us the glorious news that God's deity includes His humanity. Christmas makes it possible for us to say about God what could never have been said before, namely, that in Jesus God has become Emmanuel, God-with-us. God who is Wholly Other, who absolutely transcends man, becomes in Jesus Christ the God who is man's partner. In Jesus Christ God has become a humble God, for He who dwells in unapproachable light has become infinitely close to us. He does not look down upon us from afar. He joins us on our way. He shares our human condition, bringing to it His love and serenity.

Christmas brings us something new on the face of the earth: God has spoken God-language in human form. He has taught us in Jesus how to speak of Him, how to know Him, how to love Him.

would be a lamb sacrificed for the redemption of all.

The fact of the birth of Christ is more important than the circumstances. But the beautiful interpretation of Luke helps us to pass from the fact to the mystery from history to the doctrine involved. We must steer clear of Scylla and Charybdis, two extremes, seeing in Jesus merely a human being or seeing in Him only a divine being. The feast of Christmas was instituted precisely to fight such deviations. Were the Child only man, He could not save; were He only God, He could not save by the shedding of Blood. And God sent His Son to save.

Few pages in the New Testament speak more vividly of the moral power of the Incarnation than the second reading taken from Paul's letter to Titus. Paul tells us that we must prove by our moral lives, our Christian witness, that Christ has come into the world to save it.

Salvation is a twofold movement, a right-about-face: we turn our back on evil and turn to living a good life. God's first coming, with caroling angels revealing another world of glory, helps us, wrote Paul to turn our back on "godless ways and worldly desires" — on a life centered on this world and its material wealth. And His second coming in glory moves us to strive for a better way of life, to live temperately (never to excess in our personal desires), justly (always dealing fairly with others), and devoutly (walking always in the presence of God).

His coming is for conquest: to win us from evil to a life of such goodness that God His Father could claim us for "a people of his own." This expression of Paul's "a people of his own" alludes to the spoils of battle. After battle troops would pick over the spoils and reserve the best for their leader. Jesus came to empower us to become so good that angels at the judgment can set us aside as the spoils of God the Father — to become His forever! Such is my Christmas wish for all.

WORD FOR SUNDAY. Fr. Albert Shamon. Includes a small portrait of Fr. Albert Shamon.

Christmas Readings for the Mass at Midnight: (R3) Lk. 2:1-14 (R1) Is. 9:1-3, 5-6. (R2) Ti. 2:11-14.

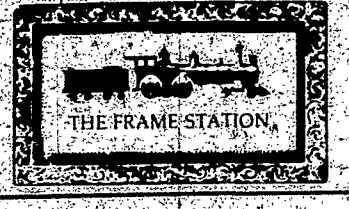
What is Christmas? A light shining in the darkness. Isaiah spoke of the Messiah as a light. His remarks in the first reading were made after the invasion of Israel by Assyria (732 B.C.). The invaders steadily deported the Hebrews to Babylon. Many of the captives, as was the brutal Assyrian custom, had had their eyes put out. Literally, they "walked in darkness." For consolation, Isaiah foretold that one day a great light would shine upon this land of gloom and bring great joy. This light would be a child — a Wonder-Counselor, like Solomon, and a God-Hero, like David. St. Matthew, who wrote his gospel to prove to Jews that Christ was the Messiah foretold by the prophets, saw Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled when Jesus began His public life in Galilee. "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphthali (these tribes had dwelt in Galilee), a people living in darkness has seen a great light" (Matt. 4:15-16).

The gospel tells us that this light first shone in Bethlehem. In his own subtle way, St. Luke, the apologist for the Gentiles, wished to point out that the glory of the Lord had shifted from the Temple in royal Jerusalem to the stable in lowly Bethlehem, from religious officialdom to outcast shepherds. And Luke used a paschal vocabulary: firstborn savior, Lord — a foreshadowing that the Light

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Lawyers Plan Bible Study

A spokesman for a group of Rochester area attorneys announced plans to hold a weekly Bible study group in downtown Rochester.

The group will meet on Tuesday mornings at 11:30 in suite 324 of the Executive Office Building at 36 W. Main St. For more information Tom Rohr should be contacted at 546-6744 or 546-7030.