

Christ's birth: Love made visible

I had a rather rotund friend in college who loved life, loved God and definitely loved food. He would often say as we ate in our cafeteria, "Food is God's love made edible." In fact, he even wrote his senior thesis on the relationship between food and theology (Banquet Feast of the Lamb, for example). One might say he was a little in love with food, but I think he was on to something there.

What does this have to do with the upcoming feast of Christmas? Well, I was thinking one day, that if food is God's love made edible, then certainly Jesus Christ Incarnate is God's love made visible.

And it is precisely this incarnate love that was so needed at the time of Jesus' birth. Praying the Psalms has given me a whole new understanding of the desperation that the chosen people must have experienced, after having been oppressed for so many years. They cry out to the Lord, "How long? When will you judge our foes?" (Psalm 6) At the point that Jesus was born, it had been about 900 years since the Jews had a unified kingdom under one monarch, with peace and prosperity all around. Those past 900 years had been a succession of wars, famines, exiles, oppression and suffering. The Jewish community had been persecuted, dispersed all across the known world and been under the rule of several successive pagan empires. Where was the fulfillment of the original covenant, where God had promised that he would give them the promised land and be with them forever? "O God, the nations have invaded our land!" they cried (Psalm 79). They must have been wondering, why is our God silent? Why is he so distant? Where were "his mercies of old"?

No one could even imagine that he was closer than ever.

In the middle of the night, in humility and without fanfare, the long-awaited king came to fulfill the covenant promised to their forefathers more than a thousand years prior. This new king, a king like David, was to be the Redeemer of Israel, to unite and increase the people of God to encompass the whole world in a new covenant of love. God hadn't deserted his people - no, he had drawn closer than before. Our Lord had done something new, something unexpected, a profound act of generosity and self-sacrificing love that the world dared not even hope for. For who

knew that our God could love us so much to become one of us?

Christmas. 'Tis the season for gift-giving. But first, let's receive a gift – the gift of the new covenant extended to us through Jesus Christ. It's only through him, love made visible, that we have learned the meaning of love. Because God became man – he initiated the sacred wedding between humanity and the Trinity. We can now become swept up in this relationship – even closer than friendship – we can become so imbued with God that we become filled with his very life, through grace, all because of a free gift of God.

Now that's love made visible.

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