



Christmas Midnight Mass 2019

Homily

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Tuesday 24 December 2019
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

*Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing: come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the new-born king.*

These words from a popular Christmas Carol remind us that, according to the Gospels, Christ was born in Bethlehem, the City of King David. In Jesus's time, the city of Bethlehem was no longer a major Jewish City, but it was significant that Jesus was born there because the ancient prophecies had foretold that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David and fulfil the promise made by God to David that his throne and kingdom would last forever.

Of course, it never occurred to the Chosen People that God would fulfil his promise by sending his own Son: that the long-awaited messiah would be not just another of God's great prophets, but God himself among us as one of us. It is no wonder that the Christmas stories tell of angels singing and wise men coming from the East to adore the new-born king. It is no wonder that our Christmas carols sing of "*joy to the world*" as the "*prince of peace*" comes among us.

The town of Bethlehem features strongly in our Christmas traditions and for good reason. You may not know that the name itself means "*house of bread*". Last year in his Christmas homily Pope Francis spoke of this and reminded us that Jesus was born in the "house of bread" and laid in a manger, a place where the animals who were in the stable that night would normally find their food. It is, remarked Pope Francis, as if Jesus "*wanted to say: 'Here I am, as your food'. He does not take (anything from us) but (instead) gives us (something) to eat; he does not give us a mere thing, but his very self. In Bethlehem, we discover that God does not take life, but gives it. To us, who from birth are used to taking and eating, Jesus begins to say: 'Take and eat. This is my body'*" (Mt 26:26).

If Pope Francis is right, and I am sure he is, then the very story of Jesus's birth has a deeply Eucharistic meaning. From the very beginning of his life Jesus offers himself to us as food for our journey through life. As he lies in the manger, he reveals himself as the bread of life; during his preaching he proclaims that his body is real food and his blood real drink; as he gathers his disciples at the Last Supper he gives himself to them, and to us, as the bread of life; as he dies



on the cross he allows his body to be broken and his blood poured out so that we can receive the gift of life which through his death and his resurrection, and his sending of the Holy Spirit, will be unleashed for us.

So yes, come tonight to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing. *Come and adore on bended knee Christ the Lord the new-born king.* Let him be your food for the journey we are all travelling together. Let him be the gift which sets us free to be the people God has created us to be. Let him be what he proclaims himself to be: our Way, our Truth and our Life. This is the birth we celebrate tonight: not just the birth of a helpless baby but the birth of a new and powerful presence of God among his people, among us. May this God, whose face is revealed in Jesus, bless you all on this holy night.