

Dear Friends,

Here we are in the Season of Christmas. Today is the feast of the Holy Family. Next week we celebrate Epiphany. The following week we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. Christmas is not just for a day. Like Advent, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time, Christmas is an important season. We move from point to point, day to day and moment to moment in our culture often without giving much thought to the fact that the events of our lives have lasting effects.

The incarnation of the Lord includes so much more than the “Christmas card” images that cannot possibly capture the reality of Jesus’ birth. What we know and celebrate on December 25 has become a raucous, extravagant and chaotic holiday devoid of peace and joy. It is always fun to open presents with great excitement and gratitude that we got what we wanted. But Christmas is not about what we want. It is about what God knows we need. It is about our need for the Good News of the Word made flesh, who dwells among us. His name is Emmanuel and his presence cannot be captured in a moment of history. It is now and we need this season of Christmas to watch it all unfold.

The seasons of our lives always take their time. They unfold slowly and in small increments, which means they require a little bit of patience and discipline in order for us to appreciate their meaning. The strands of this season connect deeply with our lives and we need to pay attention to them.

Today we see Mary and Joseph, they are such a young couple, they are far away from home, they just had a child. As they bring him to the temple to present him to God, as was their custom, we can recall the importance of baptism. What do parents experience when they bring their children to the Church to be baptized? This is something sacred, holy and beautiful. Baptism is all about new life. It is all about the relationship of love we share with God for ever.

On the feast of Epiphany we hear the story of the three wise men who brought gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh to the Christ-child. They saw the star rising in the East, and even though they were pagan, they knew that the star meant a new king had been born and they had to pay him homage. How do we pay homage to Christ the Lord during this Christmas season? What kind of commitment are we willing to make in order to worship him, to honor him with the gift of our lives and to follow him?

On January 11, we will celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. In this moment Jesus is an adult and is about to begin his public ministry. It is a new beginning in his life. Jesus' baptism signals the response he makes to God's will. Everyone hears the voice of God say, "*You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased.*" Newly weds can connect with this moment. Young people who begin new careers can understand the excitement, the fear and the hope of utilizing their gifts in order to make something of their lives. In moments like this we can hear the voice of God thunder within our souls that we are his beloved sons and daughters and that God is pleased that we are in his heart.

Please don't treat Christmas as one day of extravagant and chaotic joy. Christmas is not a holiday. It is, rather, a holy season filled with awe and mystery. It is a season that connects in powerful ways with our lives today. The deepest connection is Emmanuel, a name which means God is with us. His presence unfolds slowly in our time and we must be attentive to this season in order to experience the fullness of its meaning in our lives.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel