

GREATEST OF GIFTS

Very Reverend Glenn Jones

Vicar General, Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious

(Reprinted with permission, *Los Alamos Daily Post*, December 3, 2023)

Ah, here we come to December. We who are a bit older may gasp: “What? Already?!” the daydreams of children—young and old—are beginning to wander toward thoughts of holidays and the magic of the Christmas season: wrappings and ribbons, cards and carols, pastries and presents, are all floating before imagination’s eyes. Oh, the aching anticipation.

And, of course, for Christians, Christmas is—as the very word implies and heralds—remembrance of one of the most singular events of their faith’s year: the remembrance of the coming of the eternal God in the flesh—becoming *incarnate*, or “enfleshed”—which led to that holiest of days—Easter, and His resurrection after dying in which He “breaks the bonds of death [for Mankind] and opens the gates of Heaven”—the opening of the opportunity of eternal life with God for His faithful and those who, if not knowing Him, do what is good and right to the best of their understanding.

And while this may seem a fantasy by many in the world, we do have the testimony of numerous witnesses to those and subsequent events—witnesses who lived with Jesus for several years (thus excluding the possibility of His simply presenting a false façade), and who died torturous deaths at the hands of those who opposed their testimony, determinedly declaring nonetheless the truth of what they had witnessed.

As I often mention here, it would seem rather too incredible that a lowly, uneducated workman from a despised little village in a vassal nation of a great empire, and who died disgraced (in the world’s eyes) as a criminal by crucifixion, could have inspired a religion that swept not only through that empire, but through the world and continuing even today—ever growing in numbers. How could such a lowborn and lowly unknown surpass the influence of great philosophers of His time such as Plato and Aristotle, or orators like Cicero and Demosthenes, or emperor philosophers such as Marcus Aurelius? And yet it is the record of HIS deeds and teachings that grace *billions* of tables and bookshelves throughout the world.

And the Church He began and inspired now lay upon the very ruins of that once greatest of empires under whose rule He lived and taught. So ... it seems a bit much to think that a mere man of His condition could do such a thing, don’t you think? ... unless there was something supernatural present as well. As Jesus Himself exclaimed: “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” (John 10:37-38) ... echoing what God lamented to Moses over a millennium prior: “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them?” (Numbers 14:11)

This relation of history doesn’t even touch upon the many, many miraculous occurrences—examined and deemed by esteemed scientists and doctors as unexplainable by natural causes—that the Vatican classifies as “worthy of belief” as miracles. Yet skepticism is understandable, natural, and even beneficial; we all know how charlatans—religious and otherwise—plague the world, not to mention those persons of sincerity who simply arrive at erroneous conclusions about various things. And we live primarily by sensory input and base our decisions upon that which those senses—either unaided or enhanced—provide. And yet, we must also recognize that that consensus is not a guarantee of truth; in fact, careful investigation often overturns preconception and prevailing theory.

Tangentially for a moment, we read how Jesus repeatedly stresses what we all already know: that death comes to all, and He warns: “Be ready. Watch!...you know neither the day nor the hour [at which it will come]” ... He urging all to lives of virtue pleasing to God as best we can at every moment, knowing that we are called to account for our lives before the eternal judge at any time. To not be complacent or presumptuous, as St. Paul was not: “...it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy...I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.” (1 Corinthians 4:2-4).