

Christmas 2022

St. Patrick's

On this sacred night, listen how St. John begins his letter: “...**What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands...this life was revealed...and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and revealed to us.**”

In becoming one with us at Christmas and taking on our flesh, God has consecrated *all* of our senses and shown that each of our five senses is holy—God's divinity glowing through *each* of our senses. That's why, St. Patrick's, over the centuries the church has engaged all of our senses as we celebrate this sacred Christmas night.

“**What we have heard...**”—so St. John says. At no other time of the year is our music so hauntingly beautiful within our Catholic tradition. Yes, musicians—in the voices, and through the instruments here tonight—they have used exquisitely beautiful sound to lift up our soul in prayer. How can we celebrate Christmas without singing together, in all its simple grandeur, “Silent Night”? Tears may come to our eyes. We hear God's love, just as the shepherds heard God's glory in the singing of the angels that first Christmas night.

Yes, **what we have heard...**”

Then, “**what we have seen...**”—so St. John whispers with wonder. We do weird things with light for this Christmas festival. We light up trees—here, and in our homes. Oh, it's the time of the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, and we let lights radiate in the darkness—not only of the night, but that darkness in our world and lives. Our lights beckon us to Jesus's words, “**I am the light of the world!**”

Indeed, “**what we have seen...**”

Then, “**what we have smelled...**” Oh, the fresh evergreen trees prominently in our sanctuary, their scent spreading sweetly through the church! And, there's the aroma of the incense, symbolizing our prayer rising to the heavens. With our noses, we're drawn more intimately into the mystery, just as the Newborn of Bethlehem smelled innocent and sweet as he lay in the manger.

Yes, “**what we have smelled...**”

Surprisingly, **“what we have touched.”** So many travel long distances during these Christmas days so they can embrace a loved one. Yes, we touch each other, a hug or a clasp of the hands—more than at any other time of the year! And more: For that one with whom we have been at odds, we place our hand gently on the shoulder of the other, or clasp their hands. Without words, a gesture of peacemaking. **“Glory to God in the highest,”** so the choir of angels sang that first night, **“...and peace on earth!”** Peace.

Tenderly, **“what we have touched.”**

Finally, **“what we have tasted.”** What special delicacies we make exclusively for these precious days, in order to make our taste buds ecstatic! Also, parishioners have given much effort to provide food and serve delicious meals to our neighbors-in-need.

And yes, at the famous Cathedral of Chartres, some forty miles from Paris, there are elegantly-crafted 12th century stained-glass windows. World-famous for their beauty. Now, the Nativity stained-glass scene is compressed—with cows and other animals crowded together, Joseph sleeping, and Mary—Mary reclining and pointing to her infant Son. Surprisingly, however, the Infant Jesus is not lying in a manger. Instead, the Infant Jesus is set on what is an altar.

Oh, Friends: It was a magnificent, creative teaching tool. The church artist wanted folks to learn and know in their heart that the same Jesus born as an infant in Bethlehem—well, that same Jesus *is* on the altar at every Mass...no longer an infant, but the crucified and risen Christ. **“Taste and see the goodness of the Lord!”**

This holy night, God looks at us and, the Son Jesus becoming human and one with us, now God smiles broadly and sees us—without exception and also in *all* our senses—amazingly, God sees us shot through with divinity.

A very Happy Christmas to you all! **“O Come, let us adore Him!”**