

GOOD FRIDAY – April 2, 2010
Fr. Jerry Kopacek

I have a question for you, and be forewarned: it's going to sound really strange. The question is: what did you get for Christmas last year? (I did warn you, didn't I?) Here we are on Good Friday; we just heard St. John's account of Jesus' suffering and death, and I'm asking about last year's Christmas presents?? Hang in there with me; there is a method to my madness...

I mentioned on Palm Sunday and last night at the Mass of the Lord's Supper that we celebrated the feast of the Annunciation, the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb, last week on March 25. And then, nine months later (the length of a human pregnancy), we celebrate Jesus birth at Christmas on December 25. The timing of Holy Week this year, being so close to this feast of the Annunciation, makes an even stronger connection than usual between the beginning of Jesus' life in his Mother's womb along with his birth in Bethlehem and his death on Calvary.

Back to my original question: what did you get for Christmas last year? If at first you were thinking about those new clothes or that new computer game or other things like that, maybe this reminder of the beginning of Jesus' earthly life and human existence broadens our perspective. God sent his Son into the world, with the loving and freely-given cooperation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to be our Savior and Redeemer—to reconcile us with himself and to reopen the gates of heaven that had been closed by the sin of our first parents. Jesus came into the world as a baby boy—not just to be 'ooh-ed' and 'aah-ed' over as the cutest little tyke ever born. Rather, he came to grow up and proclaim that the kingdom of God had come in himself and in his teaching. As he told Pontius Pilate: "For this I was born...and came into the world, to testify to the truth." And doing so led Jesus directly to opposition and to the chain of events leading to his crucifixion.

Without Good Friday, there would be no Christmas; without Jesus' death, we would have no reason whatsoever to celebrate or even know of his birth. Many years ago I got a Christmas card that makes this connection in a very powerful way; it has been on my office wall ever since. On the cover is a baby's footprint, just like you might have had made and placed in your baby scrapbook when your children were born. Near that footprint are the words: "Unto you is born this day...", at which point you open the card to read: "...a Savior which is Christ the Lord." With those words, however, is not a baby's print but instead a man's hand with a bloody nail wound in the middle of that hand. It is striking, to say the least; it is horrifying, and it really happened.

So once more the question: what did you get for Christmas last year, or any other year? Besides the gifts that you unwrapped (things you perhaps don't use any more or even remember any more), you also got the gift of Jesus—the Son of God who came into the world to win you back for God because of his unlimited, passionate love for you. On December 25, you only begin to unwrap that divine gift. Today, on Good Friday, that Christmas gift is brought to its fulfillment; today, the unwrapping is completed. As John tells us, Jesus on the cross said: "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit."