

“A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...” This well-known textual introduction belongs to one of my favorite cinematic sagas and probably the greatest and most famous science fiction films of all time: *Star Wars*. If for some sad reason you’ve never seen or even heard of *Star Wars* or of its famous introduction, then you may *indeed be from* a “galaxy far, far away.” No, I’m totally kidding, please don’t take that personally. But seriously, if you’ve never seen *Star Wars*, you need to get on that ASAP.

Tonight/today, I’d like to modify that famous introduction to the *Star Wars* movies just slightly: A long time ago, in fact almost 2,000 years ago, in *our own galaxy*, on this beautiful planet called Earth, in a small village named Bethlehem, located in the Middle East in what was then referred to as Roman Palestine but is now called the West Bank, a baby, named Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit, was born to a young mother named Mary and her husband Joseph.

We’re here tonight/today to celebrate the birth of this baby because this small, defenseless, precious baby *is the Son of God*, the long-awaited Messiah, the Redeemer of the human race who would save all

people from sin and death. In fact, Jesus' own name, which in Hebrew means "God saves," is a fundamental expression of His identity and His mission. The celebration of Christmas is all about the birth of this little baby in Bethlehem named Jesus—this little baby who would literally transform the world forever.

And *unlike Star Wars*, which is a great science-fiction story designed to entertain us, the Nativity Story recounting the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is based on a *true story*, which means that it *actually happened*. This isn't some "fairy-tale" that was devised by "evil people with evil motives." There's *absolutely no evidence of that*. In fact, all of the available evidence is to the contrary, indicating that this truly happened. Three summers ago, I was blessed as a deacon to travel to Bethlehem in the West Bank and see the exact spot located within the Church of the Nativity where most historians and scholars maintain Jesus was born. Suffice it to say it was one of the most powerful experiences of my young life.

Brothers and sisters, our Catholic faith is rooted in *human history*—in actual historical events that took place within space and time

and involved real people. And not only that, but the 12 Apostles, their disciples, their successors, and members of the early Church were all willing to die, and many of them *were killed*, for the sake of this Nativity Story, which recounts the birth of our infant Savior.

Now brothers and sisters, on a very human level, any mother and father would probably agree that having a baby *naturally changes everything*. In fact, a baby not only transforms the lives of their parents, but can also transform the lives of everyone around them. And most would say that a baby changes lives *for the better*—that a baby improves the lives of their parents and families in that the child makes them more loving, more selfless, more compassionate, more patient, etc.

Well this baby named Jesus whom we come together to celebrate tonight/today, was born to change lives in the most serious, dramatic, and supreme manner. This fundamental reality is what makes Christmas very personal because this baby named Jesus was *born for you and for me*. This precious little baby in Bethlehem was born to *change my life and your life—to transform our lives forever!* And while we celebrate the *birth* of this baby named Jesus, this was a child who, *paradoxically*,

*was born to die. More specifically, He was born to die for you and for me, for my sins, for your sins, and for the sins of the entire human race.* This baby was born *so that we could be reborn in Him* to a new life of holiness, love, freedom, peace, joy, and happiness. This is why Christmas is a monumental call to evangelization in that the birth of the Son of God, the birth of the Savior of the human race, *demand*s that we share this Good News with as many people as possible!

Pope Benedict XVI said it best, when he stated, “*God is so great that He can become small. God is so powerful* that He can make Himself vulnerable and come to us as a defenseless child, so that we can love Him.” Brothers and sisters, God's infinite power is ironically expressed through His profound humility. Our salvation and hope lies in the defenseless and vulnerable baby born into poverty, in a dirty manger where animals fed, to a young couple who was rejected in Bethlehem in Roman Palestine almost 2,000 years ago. Even at His human birth, God clearly didn't waste time entering into the brokenness of our existence.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter how corny this might sound, it's the Truth: our Lord Jesus Christ *is the “Reason for the season.”* This infant

Savior is the greatest gift we could ever receive. In the midst of our broken world that seems to be infected with so much hatred, division, violence, selfishness, and fear, and in the midst of our dysfunctional and imperfect lives, with all of our own problems, sinfulness, woundedness, and struggles, this little baby named Jesus *is our redemption, our freedom, our peace, our light, our hope, and our joy*. The weak and defenseless baby in the dirty manger in Bethlehem *is the meaning of our lives* and *as Love incarnate, He is the meaning of life itself*.

Christmas reminds us that God is not some impersonal, abstract, and distant Being, but rather a compassionate and merciful Father Who lovingly reaches out to His children, embraces them, and unites Himself to their suffering and pain in order to save them. God did not abandon us to the misery of our own sins or to the power of death, but rather He lovingly sent His only-begotten Son into our world in order to give us the authentic love and freedom that we as human beings naturally desire and were created for. God became one of us so that we might become *one with Him* in true happiness now and forever in Heaven.

So brothers and sisters, this Christmas, don't just go through the motions. Don't just come to mass and then leave it at that. This baby named Jesus, whose birthday we celebrate tonight/today, is knocking on the door of your hearts. This baby is inviting you into a deeper, more intimate relationship with Him *in and through* His Church. This baby named Jesus wants to grow closer to you so that He can bless your life with so much grace, peace, freedom, joy, and love. So stay close this baby through prayer and the sacraments, most especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This baby wants to sanctify you and ultimately save you.

So in a few moments, we will encounter, worship, and receive this precious baby, Jesus Christ our Lord, truly present in the Most Holy Eucharist. As we worship and receive Him, let's allow this baby, our Savior, to truly transform our lives forever.