



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Nativity of Our Lord-Vigil Mass-Bodmin

***Readings: Isaiah 62: 1-5, Psalm 88, Acts 13: 16-17 27 29,***

***Matthew 1: 1-25***

I have a group of very old friends who have met together for forty years to encourage and support one another in the sacred ministry. Only one of them is unmarried and therefore, to the best of our knowledge, never had children. We were joshing one afternoon and asked him how he responded, in his parish, when enthusiastic mums or grandmas suddenly presented him with the latest gurgling scrap of humanity.

‘Well’, he said, ‘I don’t like to lie so I gaze into the pushchair and declare, My – THAT IS A BABY!

and that generally goes down well.’

Unbidden he then continued,

‘If it is a particularly ugly baby I usually add,

AND DOESN’T HE LOOK JUST LIKE YOU?

And that goes down even better.’

Without gender stereotyping too much it is probably accurate to say that, when a photo of a newborn is produced, the ladies will gather round and coo. The men will be thinking, ‘It’s a baby.’ You can’t buck biology.

So what draws us all, again and again, to this baby in the manger at Bethlehem? At one level we can say simply, 'It's a baby' – and we would be telling true. Like the rest of newborn humanity, Jesus is full of wind and water, needing bonding and comfort, feeding, changing and nurturing love. If He is not fully human then He cannot represent us. He looks like you. The carol that says 'Tears and smiles like us He knew.' is the truth. The one that says 'Little Lord Jesus no crying He makes' is heretical humbug. But there is more than that. We have come again because He looks like His parents. The beauty of the Christ child is that He looks like His Blessed Mother, full of grace, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And He is the spitting image of His Father, the very outreach of the love and mercy of the Lord of all creation for Fallen Man.

If He is not truly God He cannot save us.

We are drawn to the mystery of divine mercy, to the ultimate condescension of God, come to share our mortal lot. We are drawn to the enigma of the apotheosis of Man who, in this child can yet regain our eternal destiny.

We come to the stable – travellers all – simple hearted shepherds from close by, wise men from a long and roundabout journey. It is a journey not only of the body but of the mind and the heart. The simplest of us still seek to understand. The cleverest of us still yearn for love. But this can never be a battle of the intellect versus the heart. We need both.

But we needs remember, for all our cleverness, that alone will never see us home. Long after this central control panel has gone down and we have entered, what the Psalmist calls, 'the land where all things are forgotten', the heart, with all its wisdom, will remain.

We will know whom we have loved and who has loved us.

The pilgrimage to Bethlehem is, in the end, a journey of the heart.

There, with our companions, we will kneel in the straw before the child  
in the arms of Mary and tell true:

‘My, that is a baby !’

And gazing upon His Blessed Mother in her serene and God filled beauty,  
whisper with quiet joy and thankful, thrilling heart:

‘And doesn’t He look just like you.’