John 1:14

A Discourse for Christmas day.

Et Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis.

And the Word was made flesh [flesh], and dwelt among us. Words taken out of the 1st Chap. of St John and the 14th V.

The time was come when the son of God according to the scriptures, the son of God was to make his appearance in the World. Then were nearly accomplished the seventy weeks of years predicted by the Prophet Daniel when iniquity should be abolished and sanctity restored.[1] Then it was easy to see that the Prophecy of the Patriarch Jacob was fulfilled, when, being on the bed of death, he declared to his children, the time wherein the Messiah should be born: The Scepter, said he to them, shall not be taken away from Juda . . . till he come that is to be sent, Gen. 49th. 10. For in seeing Judea compelled to pay tribute and submit to the Roman Government, it was easy to conclude that the time was come when the Saviour of the World was to be born: but as the Prophets not only foretold the time when the Messiah was to be born,

[1 See Daniel 9:24–27.]

the tribe and family in which he was to be born, but even the very place of his birth, according to these words of Micheas: And Thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel; Behold the Providence of God, who makes all things subservient to his divine purposes, permits the Emperor to publish a decree that every one should repair to his own City to have his name enregistered. In compliance with this order the B. Virgin, though with child & near the time of her delivery by a special direction of providence, undertook this tedious journey in company with her holy spouse S' Joseph, hereby teaching all people their obligation of obeying those whom Providence has placed over them; And after a painful journey of at least four days arrived at Bethlehem. And it came to pass says the Evangelist S' Luke, when they were there, her time of being delivered was accomplished. And she brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the Inn. What prodigies, what instructions, exclaims S' Austin, are comprised in these words! The Eternal, exclaims S' Austin, subjects himself to time, the impassible to sufferings, the immortal to death, a pure creature gives life to her Creator, a Virgin becomes a mother without ceasing to be a Virgin, a woman brings forth without pain, the chast
[chaste] fruit which she had conceived without corruption: he whom the heavens of heavens cannot contain. 3 REGS 8.27.[2] is lodged in a manger; he who dwelleth in light inaccessible.
1 TIM. 6.16, is wrapped in rags, the Master and the Creator of the whole universe, who stretcheth out the heaven like a pavilion, and to whom the earth belongs, hath not where to lay his head, Ps. 103.16.[3] Ps. 23.1. Math 8. 20. He is rejected by men and is constrained to seek shelter amongst beasts: in a word, the word is made flesh, a God becomes man, and he, as St Austin says, who from all eternity was begotten of a Father God without a mother, becomes in time the son of a mother without a father. Here, my D' Friends, struck with astonishment at this his double birth, we may well cry out with the Prophet Isaias, who shall declare his generation? generationem ejus quis enarrabit? Is. 53.8. But if, from these prodigies, which chiefly serve to excite our admiration, we would past[4] to what may be serviceable to our instruction, let us reflect, that the Savior of the world, different from other children, very different from other children, was master to choose for himself rich parents, and to assume human nature with all the accommodations that might render it supportable, nevertheless he assumed it with all the appendages of poverty and misery. Now if we ask why he is born of a poor Mother, why he suffered the rigour of cold in being born in a stable, at midnight and in the depth of winter, St Peter Chrysologus answers us that he would thus be born for us who would be loved by us. Sic ergo nasci voluit qui amari voluit. Let us then Ought we not let us raise up our minds to acknowledge the Divinity of him who appeared only in the form of a servant. Philip. 2.7.

Now there were in the same Country, says the Evangelist, shepherds watching, and keeping the night – watches over their flock. And behold an Angel of the Lord stood hard by them, and a divine Brightness shined round about them: and they were exceedingly afraid. And the Angel said to them: fear not: for behold I bring to you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
The more the Mystery of the Man God is incomprehensible to the mind of man, the more he stands in need of the Spirit of God to convince him of it. It did not suffice that an Angel appeared to the Blessed Virgin to assure her that the child whom she should conceive in her womb, should be the work of the Holy Ghost, and afterwards to St Joseph, to declare | confirm | to him in the same truth, but it was necessary for the sufficient | order that mankind might be sufficiently instructed herein, that one should also appear to the shepherds.

Behold then the Blessed Spirits descend from Heaven to acknowledge their sovereign. The night, according to the expression of the Royal Prophet, Ps. 138. 12. appeared as light as day, because there was question of announcing him who came into the world to dispel | dissipate | the darkness of sin and to bring to us the light of his grace. The shepherds were seized with terror at the brightness that surrounded them, when the Angel of the Lord appeared to them, who not only dispelled their fears but filled them with inexpressible joy. To form some idea | conception | of the great joy which the Angel announced to them, let us reflect on the miserable condition mankind was in before the coming of Jesus Christ. It is well known that by the sin of Adam all mankind fell with him into the abyss of corruption, their understanding was darkened and subjected to ignorance and error, and their will was become weak and violently bent upon evil. They were sensible of their evil but could find no remedy for it; the Philosophers, who pretended to cure it only increased it: the coming of our Saviour alone could effect a cure; the light and power of his grace alone could enlighten the blind and fortify the weak; and he was the Desired of all Nations.

How earnestly did not the just and the Prophets long to see this happy event! In what lively accents did they not, but in vain, express this their ardent desire, sometimes thus in addressing themselves to the Heavens: Drop down dew, ye Heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just: at other times to the earth: let the earth, they pray, be opened, and bud forth as a saviour. It was not till the fullness of time was come Gal. 4.4 that our Lord appeared clothed with our flesh, and as to our fore fathers they only saw him by faith. Behold then what is the subject of our joy: it is that the Messiah who had been expected during so many ages, is born on this day, quia natus est hodie, That he is born to us, vobis. That he is born to be to us a Saviour, Salvator. Is not this a subject of great joy? Evangelizo vobis gaudium magnum. For this joy is not to the Shepherds only, but to all the people, because he is born for all, quod erit omni populo. Moreover, that he might not be mistaken and regarded as a simple | mere | Prophet, he is not only called Christ, that is anointed, a
title which is given to many, but Christ, the Lord. *Christus Dominus*, a quality, that can be applied to none but him alone, and to intimate that the promise which had been made to David, was now accomplished, the Angel assures [asserts] that he is born in the city of David, *quia natus est vobis hodie Salvator. qui est Christus Dominus, in civitate David.*[7]

[7 See Luke 2:10–19 (DRB).]

[8]

But behold the Angel is going to characterize him in a more particular manner still in manifesting [describing] him to us as God made man, which cannot fail to excite our admiration at the wisdom and conduct of the Lord. The Jews, addicted to their senses and passions, mistook [misunderstood] the prophets, and framed to themselves a Messiah agreeable to their own fancy, who should be a rich and mighty conqueror, and who should make their nation the most flourishing empire in the world. But such a Savior could only have served to nourish, not to heal our corruption; hence to undeceive them, the Angel told the shepherds that they should find the Saviour of the world in the state of a tender [little] infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, *et hoc vobis signum, invenietis infanTEM pannis involutum, positum in praesepio.* Thus it was that he appeared clothed with our humanity, but lest this state of weakness and poverty should discourage them, the Angel was joined by a multitude of Heavenly Host[s] who in the most profound sentiments of adoration and love, sound forth the praises of their Lord and fill not only the Heaven but also the earth with their melody.

[9]

By this humiliation & annihilation as I may say of the Son of God, we are taught that all persons of whatever description ought to be truely humble, and that the more elevated be their rank or dignity, the more profound ought to be their humility. Humility is the mark or sign of a Christian, it was by this that the Master was know[n], *et hoc vobis signum* and it is by this that his disciples are to be distinguished. Let us then imitate his humility and thus honor his humility; let us go as far as Bethlehem and prostrating ourselves taking the shepherds for our guides, pay our most profound adoration to our new born Saviour.

As soon as the Angels, says the Evan: [Evangelist] were departed from them in to Heaven, the Shepherds said to one another: let us go as far as Bethlehem, and let us see this word, that is made, which the Lord hath shewed us.

No sooner had the Angel departed from the Shepherds, although he had laid no command on them; they than they formed the resolution and effectively set off for Bethlehem to see their Saviour. By this example we are taught that as soon as the faithful soul knows the good she can do, as soon as Almighty God has inspired her with the thought of doing it,
It would be an infidelity to his grace, not to put it in execution: moreover, when in listening to the instructions of the ministers of J. C. or of Superiors, who hold the place of Angels with respect to us, the Holy Ghost produces in us the thought of doing some good work, let us not fail to correspond thereunto by a faithful cooperation.

The Evangelist continues, And they came speedily: and found Mary, and Joseph, and the Infant laid in the manger.

If the fidelity of the Shepherds was great, great also was their recompense; they lost no time in going to Bethlehem, \textit{venerunt festinantes}, and they were so happy as to find Jesus and Mary, \textit{invenerunt Mariam & puerum positum in præsepio}. Let us imitate their conduct and we shall not fail to obtain a similar favour.

One of the most requisite conditions of finding our Lord, is that we seek him with promptitude,\(^9\) because it is one of the clearest proofs of the earnest desire we have to find him.

As soon as the Spouse in the Canticles perceived that she had lost her beloved, she immediately took the resolution to rise and seek him throughout the City, \textit{surgam et circuibo civitatem}.

\(^8\) Archer has used the ampersand, the Latin symbol for “et,” translated as “and.”
\(^9\) “promptitude” – Cheerful readiness; quickness in action and decision; promptness.
\(^10\) See Canticle of Canticles (Song of Solomon) 3:2.

as soon as the prodigal child had reflected on the wretchedness of his state, he resolved and speedily executed his design of returning to his Father, \textit{surjam, et ibo ad patrem}.\(^11\) As soon as the Angel, who came to announce to the Shepherds the birth of her Saviour, was departed, they concluded that they ought go to Bethlehem, and, without a moments delay, they repaired thither, \textit{venerunt festinantes}, and they found what the Angel had told them, \textit{invenerunt puerum positum in præsepio}: so that they might say with the Prophet: \textit{As we have heard, so have we seen, in the city of our God Sicut audivimus, sic vidimus in civitate Dei nostri};\(^12\) Such are the models we ought to follow if we are desirous of the like happiness. If the greater part of Christians do not find the Lord, the reason is, that they either do not seek him at all or they seek him remissly,\(^13\) very different from the shepherds in our gospel who merited to find the greatest of all blessings because they sought him without delay.

\(^12\) See Psalm 47:9.
\(^13\) “remiss(ly)” – Remiss; lazily, laxly; without vigor, slowly, carelessly, indifferently.
To understand how great is the happiness of those who find God, it is necessary to know that he alone can render them happy, because he alone is capable of satisfying the desires of their hearts. All other goods do but incence\textsuperscript{[14]} our desires, and they even who abound the most in them are not exempt from feeling the pressure of want and indifference. Achab was rich and powerful, being a king of Israel, nevertheless he ardently desired the vineyard of Naboth, and he regarded it so necessary to his happiness, as to commit murder in order to possess himself of it. Aman was raised to the highest rank a subject could aspire to, but Mardochai refused to bend his knee to him, and this was sufficient to render him unhappy: and he could enjoy no rest, till he had destroyed the whole Jewish nation and thus involve this one man in a general massacre. On the contrary we have only to open the Books of the holy Scripture and the Works of the holy Fathers to see the consolation, the peace, the joy, and the sanctity of a soul that possesseth her\textsuperscript{[15]} God. Whether she be in affluence or in want, whether she enjoy health or be afflicted with sickness, she is entirely tranquil and happy because she desires nothing but that the will of God be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Let us then my D\textsuperscript{f} Friends, go to Bethlehem with the diligence and fervor of the shepherds, repair frequently at this holy time go to Bethlehem, I do not mean to the City of David, but, as Bethlehem signifies according to its Etymology, the house of bread, I mean to our Chapel, to the Holy place in which we are now assembled, which may truely be considered as another Bethle\textsuperscript{[hem.]} Where we shall not fail to find Jesus, who is the true bread of life capable of satisfying our most ardent desires. Here we may regard the Altar as the Manger where he receives his new birth, the Eucharistic species as the swaddling clothes in which he is wrapped and he is here surrounded by a multitude of angelical host[s]. Hither let us especially during this holy time, with the diligence and fervor of the shepherds repair, to offer him our Homages of adoration, praise and love.

After the Shepherds have been so servicable to our instruction I must not conclude my discourse without briefly expounding to you that which the Blessed Virgin herself has supplied us with. And Mary says the Evangelist, kept all these words, comparing them in her heart. From these words, three things may be remarked which particularly deserve our attention.

The first is, that she observes a strict silence on an occasion wherein she might have spoken of an event which would have been so very exceedingly glorious to her; in which she hereby says S\textsuperscript{t} Ambrose gives us a great example of silence and modesty: to be able with truth to
say that she was the mother of God, that she was a mother without having lost her virginity, and that she was willing to appear in the eyes of men as having brought forth an ordinary infant according to the common ways of nature, is what cannot be sufficiently admired, but what people do not seek to imitate. In fact, how eager are they to set themselves off to the best advantage, and to make known that in which they excell others? Does self love omit any occasion of saying what may procure us the praise or attract the notice & esteem of others?

The second is that Mary preserved all these things in her mind. Maria autem conservabat omnia verba hæc. That is all that had passed in the conception and birth of her son, all the shepherds had seen, and heard: nothing escaped her memory: she faithfully kept all these things in her heart. How many graces, how many blessing have we not received from Almighty God since our birth to the present time? He hath regenerated us in the salutary waters of Baptism, a thousand times hath he prevented us by a salutary fear from committing such or such a crime, and excited by his holy inspirations to the practice of such or such a virtue and yet how unmindful are we of all he hath done for us, we do not reflect that he hath not done in like manner to every nation.[Ps. 147.]

The third is that Mary kept all these things not in a manner of inaction but she pondered & compared them in her heart. As she knew that the scriptures had foretold that a Virgin should conceive, and bear a son, and that his name should be called Emanuel, that is, God with us. Isa. 7. 14. That the Ox should know its owner and the Ass his masters crib Isa. 1. 3., she compared on the one hand, what the Prophets had said, and on the other what she beheld with her eyes and she used these holy refactions to exercise |nourish| her faith and to enliven her gratitude towards him who had done such great things to her.

Such is My Dear Friends the model which the B. Virgin gives us of meditation. Let us then, my D' Friends, make ours according to it, in meditating on the Mystery. To meditate then with profit on the Mystery which we at this time honour, let us consider the Majesty of the newborn Infant who humbles himself beneath all; let us reflect on the Divinity of him who clothes himself with our flesh, then let us compare his humility with our pride, his contempt of honors with our ambition, his love with our tepidity, his mortification & and poverty with our sensuality and selflove, and flushing[16] to see the Lord humbled and the servant proud, let us henceforth glory in nothing but in humbling ourselves and in imitating him who is to come to set us an example of all virtues. Then, if a temptation should solicite us to evil, if a suggestion

[16 “flushing” – The lower portion of the initial letter “f” possibly blotted and corrected to the letter “b.” If “blushing,” used in standard sense; however, if “flushing”: a rush of emotion, to be filled with or inflamed, heated, a fit of fever; (arch./obs.) insolent, conceited.]
should be made to us contrary to the sanctity of the religion we profess, let us not fail to answer with a generous soldier

[16]

spoken of in the holy scripture, who being solicited to go and take his rest at house |in his home|: he said, The Ark of God, and Israel and Juda dwell in tents, and my Lord Joab and the servants of my lord abide upon the face of the earth: and shall I go into my house, to eat and drink and to sleep. No, he solemnly protested he would do so such thing. In like manner let us answer: What! the Lord of Heaven and earth, of whom the Ark was but a figure, is lodged in a stable, he suffers from poverty, nakedness and cold, and shall I be desirous of every accommodation of ease and convenience, shall I seek after honors and indulge myself in sensual pleasures! by the grace of God I will do no such thing. By this means we shall says the Ven. [Venerable] Bede, learn to know God, to love him, to imitate him, and to bless him; for if the Shepherds, knowing only the wonderful things that had happened at the birth of our Saviour, returned praising and glorifying and praising God in all things, which they had heard and seen, as it had been told them, how much more we, who are become acquainted with the succession and order of the Mysteries, who well know how and for what reason the Word is made flesh, who are not ignorant that he hath suffered a cruel & ignominious death, not only for the just but also for the wicked. Roms. 5.6 who are sanctified by his Sacraments, animated by his example, who have received most abundant graces & blessings from him; how much more, I say, are not we obliged to praise him, not only by our words but also by our actions? How great is our obligation to bear always in never to forget, that this God becomes man like unto us, in order to render us like unto him, to communicate unto us the life of grace here and eternal glory hereafter. A Happiness &c [etc.] In the name

[17 See 2 Kings 11:11.]