

## Feast of Christmas (C)

This is a story that was just on CNN News recently. Matthew Foster is a six-year-old boy from Forth Worth, Texas. He is blind, has autism, and hates posing for pictures. But his mother, Misty, says he is very interested in Santa. So, Misty decided she would give it a try: she took Matthew and his little twenty-month-old sister, Lily, to a store in Fort Worth to see Santa. Mom really wanted to get there early to avoid the crowds and minimize the stares if Matthew or Lily had a “meltdown.”

The plan worked. They got there early and were able to walk right up to see Santa. Now, Matthew does talk, but he doesn't interact with people unless he feels comfortable with them. When Mom walked up to Santa, with Matthew hesitating and still at a safe distance, she whispered to Santa explaining Matthew's blindness and autism. Santa immediately raised his hand and said, “*Say no more.*” He knew exactly what to do.

Santa got out of his big chair and walked over to Matthew and he knelt down next to him. He invited Matthew to touch his velvet cloak, the big buttons, and his floppy hat. After a few cautious moments, Santa asked him if he had ever felt a reindeer. Matthew had not.





So, realizing he somewhat had Matthew's confidence, Santa actually picked Matthew up and carried him over to the display area where he petted the taxidermy reindeer they had set up. Then, Santa even let Matthew pull on his beard--and a big smile came over Matthew's face!



*"Twas the Night Before Christmas"* is one of Matthew's favorite books and he knows it by heart. When Santa asked Matthew if he was happy, Matthew suddenly quoted the poem and asked to feel, as the verses say, *"your eyes that twinkle."* So, Santa let him touch his eyes all over for as long as he wanted.

As cautious Mom watched, she feared that the magical moment would end when Santa asked Matthew to sit with him for a picture; so, she was blown away when he agreed.



Mom said, *“I was just waiting for the meltdown at that point and as soon as Matthew said ‘yes,’ my jaw just dropped. His baby sister gave the Grinch face, but this time around Matthew was actually looking at the camera with head up and everything. I need Santa in my life for family pictures.”* She later tweeted: *“It was magical. Santa had his trust right away. Now I keep saying that he met the real Santa.”*



Kneeling next to Matthew allowed Santa to capture the attention of a little blind, autistic boy. He carefully approached Matthew and actually knelt at his physical level. But, the reality is that Santa did not see a blind, autistic child; he just saw an inquisitive little boy-- period. When Santa knelt, he showed a loving care and a compassionate concern.

We assemble in this sacred space tonight(day) to celebrate an amazing event: what is known in theology as the Incarnation, the very presence of God in a baby born in Bethlehem. The image is very clear in our minds. On a starry night, Jesus is born in a stable and laid in a manger where the animals come to eat hay. Then, shepherds appear at the stable. As they approach, they kneel down in adoration. The sense of being in the presence of an awesome mystery was unmistakable. The kneeling of the shepherds indicated who this infant lying in the manger would actually become. They also cared and extended a compassionate concern to the baby and to Mary and Joseph. The shepherds' kneeling allowed them to begin to take in a mystery of love that would change their hearts.

In our own lives we are often astray and, maybe even lost-- without meaning or purpose in life-- until we kneel down before something other than ourselves. And so, as disciples with a Lord and Savior, it is appropriate that we kneel at the creche. But, I would also like you to contemplate another image that you may find startling at first. Rather than the image of us kneeling before our Lord and Savior, think about the image of our Lord and Savior kneeling before us. That's right --- Jesus kneeling before us; Jesus kneeling right next to us. It's a unique and challenging thought, but it is a deep sign of God's love: God's respect for you and me.

God created each one of us out of perfect love. The Creator of the universe loves us --- loves you and me, individually and personally --- despite all that is in us that makes us unlovable. God sees the good in us that we, too often, tarnish. And, most of all, God sees in us the potential we have-- the potential he created in us.

God created us with such a tremendous potential for goodness and kindness and forgiveness and compassion; that is what holiness is about. God created us with a great potential for love --- and for sacrifice. He created us with the potential to allow the Divine to take up residence within us and become a major force in our lives. He created us with that potential-- and God, in Jesus, kneels down before that potential every day, particularly our days of struggle and hardship. Jesus kneels next to us and invites us to touch him... and to allow his touch of forgiveness and love to enrapture the very heart and soul of our lives. When the Lord kneels next to us, he doesn't see the frail, struggling, sinful person I can be; he sees the potential of his own image.

That potential was fully realized in the birth we celebrate today. In Jesus, the full realization of the human and the Divine intersected. In Jesus, we have a glimpse of what we can become. In Jesus, God chooses not to give up on the human family... or even his Church... which we may be tempted to do at times. 2000 years ago in Bethlehem, Jesus chose rather to unite his very being with the human family in order to save us. Tonight(day), Jesus chooses to unite his very being with us in the Eucharist, so that we as Church can continue to be the Body of Christ in the world today.

Someone once observed that in the story of Jesus' birth there are three miracles:

- The first miracle is that a young virgin gives birth.
- The second miracle is that God becomes human.
- And the third miracle is that this is a mystery without end.

Christ is continuously born throughout history, in all disciples who truly open their hearts to him. As individuals... as a community of faith... as a Church in need of healing... God does not give up on us. God continues to kneel before us, each day, hoping that our true potential for love and compassion and holiness can eventually be realized. On this Christmas feast, can you visualize God kneeling next to you, and see the hope he has in his eyes for you?

