

Personals Notice
(on Xmas Night)

Christmas and its holidays may be well and truly over for practically everyone by now, but the season doesn't really end till this coming Sunday, in the Church's celebration. That's the festival of the Baptism of our Lord. And it's not, as you might think, just because His Baptism marks the beginning of the next stage of the human life of Jesus. After all, His Presentation in the Temple, 40 days after His birth, hasn't and won't be marked until that festival on 2nd February. No; the reason for highlighting His Baptism is intimately connected with Epiphany, a few days ago: for it's the public manifestation of Christ the Son of God. And that's the meaning of Christmas, that God is with us, has come among us as one of ourselves. Christmas doesn't end with just a memory: it's a pity we don't give a bit more attention to celebrating Epiphany as well, for there's where its significance lies, in pointing out who this Child is whose birth we celebrate each year. The coming of the Magi, and their action of kneeling in adoration, points it out: so does that voice from heaven heard at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan river, "This is my Son, the beloved": and so do the actions of Jesus which St John's gospel describes as "signs", the first of which was the water changing into wine at the wedding celebration in Cana. In a sense, there's no end to Christmastime, and it's now. Christ's passion and Calvary are part of it, and His resurrection too. We come into it by being born into a world that has been redeemed: by being born again in the water of baptism, a public act of profession of faith in Christ. And yet, there

isn't peace on earth, between all people, there's still suffering and sorrow and evil. So Christmas is more than a sentimental memory, of sweetness and light: and Christianity and the Christian message isn't only joy and comfort, happiness and peace. People talk about the "Christmas spirit": what is it, if you leave out of account who the Child is the manger is, why He's there in the first place. I remember being very struck, a number of years ago, by the comment of a lady who said to me that Christmas made her feel very uncomfortable: for we must indeed be in a very sorry state for God to have to intervene Himself in this way: and then, see what happened to Jesus. So, the good news is about a Saviour born, a Saviour who is Son of God, and who has to suffer and die for us. This too is Christmas: and the message is announced for all the world to hear, in the coming of the Magi, in the Baptism of Christ, and in the signs of God's power which He gave. Reflect about that in these days, and as we pray together today: and first in music, 'Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world; have mercy on us'

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15

MUSIC

PRAYERS (Nina Croll: Agnus)

To conclude, from a Christmas reflection on the coming of the Kingdom

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