

Today we celebrate the great Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Or in other words, Christmas.

Christmas brings to mind images of pastoral scenes covered in a layer of snow – white and pristine. Santa Claus, chubby and jolly. Nativity scenes, with Mary and Joseph, shepherds, and angels. And a chubby, curly-haired, nicely tanned, movie-star ... Baby Jesus.

Nice and clean ... everything's perfect ... great.

Let's rewind two thousand and ten years ago ...

The Jewish homeland was held under the oppressive iron fist of the Roman Empire.

Caesar Augustus issued an order to hold a census. No, this isn't Obama's work force that comes door-to-door. Uhn-uh. Everyone will go to their ancestral home town and register ... no matter how far ... no matter how dangerous ... or else. You don't mess with the Roman Legions.

Joseph, and his wife Mary - who by the way is very, very pregnant. Get on their way. She's riding on the back of a donkey. That's 80 miles ... which by foot would take at least 4 days with caravan ... longer than that with a pregnant wife. On a donkey?

When they get to Bethlehem, she's already in labor. Pain ... groans ... screams ...

People are crammed into the Inns and Boarding houses. Too many people. Joseph looks for someplace with a little privacy. Privacy? In this over-crowded situation?

A stable is available.

Just like it is here in town, when the wind is just right, you get a whiff of it. Or on the farm, when you're doing your chores, it's right there in your face. And it's certainly NOT honeysuckle and rose.

That's where the baby's going to be born ... ???

And when he's born ... and if you haven't seen a newborn ... then let me help you. More alien than human ... hair - if there is any - plastered to the head. Lots of blood.

The groans of the mother in childbirth ... the cries of the new born infant ... the shrieks ... the fluids ... the barnyard smells ...

And then come the shepherds. They won't take their annual bath until sometime in the spring. Thanks for coming, boys ... can you give us some privacy here?

These are the sights, and sounds, and smells of the first Christmas.

God has become ... a baby. In the worst of situations. In the most human of situations.

Political oppression. Difficult travel. Stables. Animals. Childbirth. Blood. Fluid. Screams.

Plaster figurines are so delicate and pristine and beautiful.

Life ... REAL LIFE ... is so, so, so, so messy.

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD ... that He sent His only Son ...

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD ... that He didn't travel first class ... or do it in luxury ...

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD ... that He took on ALL OF OUR SUFFERINGS ...

First John, chapter 4, verse 10:

*"In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins."*

God loves you ... even if you don't love Him. Even if you could care less about God right now ... He loves you so much that He will go to any lengths to get your attention and let you know that.

God loves you ... whether you're pristine and prissy ... or nasty and dirty.

GOD LOVES ... Y-O-U-!

That is the message of Christmas. If God can endure this kind of a birth ... if God can endure this kind of a life ... if God can endure this kind of a death ... then what do YOU have that God can't deal with?

Who are you that God can't love you? touch you? help you? heal you? Who are you?

And ... He ... does ... LOVE ... YOU ...

God ... loves ... you.

Let Him love you ... and then once you've got that part figured out ... love Him in return.

Merry ... Christmas.