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Preparing For Christmas.

George Bernard Shaw, the cynical author -- Irish as to birth; lefthander as to the Faith -- didn't get much out of Christmas. To him the recurring joyful event was nothing more than "a conspiracy of shopkeepers."

To us, Christmas is still a day of wonder. Without it the Christian religion would be little more than one religion among others. Because of the Incarnation, however, Christianity is unique. It is the Incarnation that makes the difference. The coming of God in human flesh is the greatest fact in the history of the world. This, and this alone, makes the Feast of Christmas. It should be a great day for all the children of God.

It would be a sad commentary on our sense of values, if we ignored the external signs that express our interior joy and faith in the returning miracle of Christmas. This is what happened in England in the early 17th century, when the Faith dimmed, and the light of laughter went out of people's eyes. The Reformers abandoned the celebration almost entirely. But in 1645 many sensed their loss, and there appeared in London this declaration:

"Any man or woman...that can give any knowledge, or tell any tidings, of an old, old, very old gray-bearded gentleman called Christmas, who was wont to be a verie familiar ghest, and visite all sorts of people both pore and rich, and used to appear in glittering gold, and silk, and silver in the Court and in all shapen in the Theatre in Whitehall, and had ringing feasts, and jollitie in all places, both in the citie and countrie, for his coming: -- whosoever can tell what is become of him, or where he may be found, let him bring him back againe into England."

Christmas Is A Reminder...

that we have been born into two worlds; one will last forever; the other will disappear altogether. The Church doesn't relish the sight of your striking a phoney bargain, buying goldbricks, or coming up to the evening of life empty-handed. And so, she uses the things of this world to remind you of the beauty of our lasting home. All the externals connected with the Feast have a spiritual significance, and an association with the Christ Child. She reminds you, these days, that Christmas is a happy event -- one that should bring you peace of mind and heart. The shepherds and the angels found it thus; so should you.

Without the Christ Child Christmas can be little more than what George Bernard Shaw saw in it -- a conspiracy of shopkeepers. Without the Child you, too, will lose all sense of values; you will forget that there is a much brighter world of realities than this fleeting world of shadows in which we live, and grope, and get lost.

Gaudete Sunday.

The Liturgy for the Third Sunday of Advent strikes the same happy note with the Introit's words of St. Paul to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord; again I say to you, rejoice..." The reason: because our Saviour is coming.

Tonight -- at 6:45, Advent Devotions in Sacred Heart Church.