



My name is Fr. Jack Michalchuk. As the new Pastor and on behalf of the communities of St. Joseph, in Smithers, and St. Anthony, in Houston, I would like to welcome you to this very special season and celebration. I'm originally from Calgary, Alberta, but spent twenty-one years as a missionary in Louisiana, where I was ordained in the land of Jambalaya, Crawfish Pie, and File-Gumbo. I've been back to my home and native land now for the last seven years, and am enjoying getting to know the Bulkley Valley area and its people these last few months (and looking forward to getting on the slopes :)).

Today is the beginning of one of the most important celebrations we have each year...the Birth of Jesus. This is such a pivotal event in history, an event that no 'credible historian' actually doubts. Jesus was born, and lived in Palestine, and started something that spread to the corners of the world and has touched billions of lives. But why is His birth so central to our Faith?

We believe, as Christians, that the God behind the origins of all of CREATION, the SOURCE behind all things, however they came to be, did not remain hidden from sight, content only to create everything out of nothing. God wanted more than that, as great as 'that' was. In addition, though God is pure SPIRIT, he astoundingly joined himself to HUMANITY in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This we call the 'Incarnation.' In other words...Jesus, though fully GOD, in his 'incarnation' is also fully MAN. In Jesus, we can SEE God, HEAR God, TOUCH God, in his humanity. And in Jesus we experience the HEART of God...that GOD IS FOR US, not against us. He shockingly comes to us as a vulnerable baby, so lowly, so approachable. He has not come to condemn, but to save us. This is the HEART of God. He wants to help and save us, and forgive us of our sins and failings. He wants us to realize all that we could be, in Him.

He is also called Immanuel, which means GOD WITH US. He did not stay behind all things, as merely CREATOR, but came to mingle with us, to walk along side of us, to experience the life we live with all its loves, joys, trials, and sorrows. And not only that, but just as He was nine months in the womb of Mary...so too does He want to be GOD IN US. "I will live in them and move among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2 Cor 6:16). He has made us to be in an eternal relationship with Him. But He doesn't force us...its an invitation...a proposal. Christmas is the time when God bends the knee, in Jesus, and proposes this eternal relationship to us.

So this Christmas season, which begins today and goes until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord in January, consider opening your heart up more and more to the greatest gift ever given....Jesus, God giving himself to us. He is FOR US. He is WITH US. He wants to be IN US. This is his proposal. I pray that you say yes to this eternal love affair, for which we have been designed from the beginning.

If I, as pastor, can be of any assistance to you, or your loved ones, in helping to deepen this relationship by lending an ear, answering a question, hearing a confession, baptizing a child, blessing a marriage, helping you work on an annulment, blessing your home, or giving some spiritual advice, or simply getting to know you....please know I am happy to help if I can. You are always welcome here at St. Joseph. Merry Christmas! Jesus is the reason for the season.

Fr. Jack





FOCUS: For Our Children and US

Parents, we have a new ministry to help both you and your Children FOCUS better during Mass. FOCUS is program approximately 40 minutes in length, covering the basic stories of the Bible, basic prayers of our faith, with some fun and song as well. It is designed for children ages 18 months through Grade 2 only. They each will participate as able (toys will also be present). With FOCUS, our little ones get a special children's FOCUS for a time, allowing parents a break themselves to FOCUS at Mass as well.

How does it work?

After the opening prayer at the 9 AM Mass on Sundays, Fr. Jack will invite your children to come forward for their FOCUS group (they can bring their offering up at this time as well if they like). Then, they will be led to the meeting room where they will have some age appropriate activities to help them grow in the basics of our faith. This gives you a break to FOCUS as an adult on the Readings, the Homily, and the Eucharistic Prayer. They will rejoin you in time to get their blessing at Communion time, allowing you to get some FOCUS time for yourselves, while still having some time for them to be with us all at Mass for a bit, for they are a welcome and cherished part of our community.

With a growing adult faith, you can be more and more confident that you have what you need to pass on that faith to your children. Hopefully this new program helps you in achieving this goal. Please consider participating as much as you'd like. You're also welcome to attend with your children until they get comfortable. So, take advantage of FOCUS, For Our Children and US!

**The first FOCUS session will be
Sunday January 12th @ 9 AM Mass (only).**



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