Christmas Dawn Mass (Lk 2:15-20)

**BORN IN A STABLE**

In 2016, we marked the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, when one million people were killed or wounded. One of those who perished 100 years ago was a young Irish parliamentarian and poet, Thomas Kettle. A few days before he died in 1916, he wrote a poem to his daughter Betty:

In wiser days, my darling rosebud, blown

To beauty proud as was your mother's prime,

In that desired, delayed, incredible time,

You'll ask why I abandoned you, my own,

And the dear heart that was your baby throne,

To dice with death. And oh! they'll give you rhyme

And reason: some will call the thing sublime,

And some decry it in a knowing tone.

So here, while the mad guns curse overhead,

And tired men sigh with mud for couch and floor,

Know that we fools, now with the foolish dead,

Died not for flag, nor King, nor Emperor,-

But for a dream, born in a herdsman's shed,

And for the secret Scripture of the poor.

At Christmastime, we are brought back to a herdsman's shed to gaze with hearts full of awe at the tiny infant that is truly God with us. Saint Clare urges us: “Look at the poverty of him who was placed in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. O marvellous humility! O astonishing poverty! The King of the angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, is laid in a manger”.

As we reflect on the Christmas story each year, we come to a deeper understanding of the mystery that we celebrate. We see that the story of Jesus, Mary and Joseph continues to be lived out in the lives of all who struggle with the hardships of life - particularly in the tens of thousands of refugees and displaced peoples throughout our world and in all who are on the margins of our society.

We continue to be challenged by the story of Christmas. The infant of Bethlehem reminds us that all our human reality is shot through with the divine. God is to be found in each of our brothers and sisters, and our world has been forever changed. We too are led by a dream, born into reality in a stable.

May the divine Child be with you this Christmas and remain with you throughout the New Year.