There are at least two ways of looking at the Crib, at the Christmas story. One is the way taken by St. Matthew and St. Luke who provide us with a welter of historical details, recalled in every school Nativity play. St. Matthew tells us Jesus was born *during the reign of King Herod*, that wise men came from the east *to do him homage*, bearing gifts and led by a star, that Herod was furious and slew all the male children under two years’ old. So Mary and Joseph fled into Egypt, although later, when Archelaus ascended the throne, they returned home and settled in Nazareth. St. Luke adds more details, which he may have heard directly from Our Lady. It was *when Quirinius was governor of Syria* that *Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census to be taken.*That’s why Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem to be registered and whilst there, She gave birth to Jesus in a stable, *because there was no room at the inn*. Gosh, the night, the cold, the poverty! Just then, angels announced His birth to shepherds, who hurried into town to adore the Child. A week later, Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem to have Jesus circumcised, and in the Temple they met Simeon and Anna. So the Child grew up, but Luke gives us a glimpse of His hidden life in Nazareth when aged twelve, lost in Jerusalem, they found Him in deep discussion with the religious experts.

So first of all, we can look at the Crib through the eyes of Matthew and Luke. We can ponder the historical details and imagine the wondrous events. But as a teenager, like many people today, I began to wonder: Is all this true? Was Jesus an historical Person? Are these infancy narratives myth? Is the Christmas story, however enchanting, fiction not fact? Yet that’s exactly why Matthew and Luke are keen to give us many historical markers, like Luke telling us it was *the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar’s reign*, that *Pontius Pilate was governor*, *Herod the tetrarch* and so on. There may be literary licence and poetic embellishment but these writers do want to assure us, clearly and without doubt, the Incarnation was an historical event. It occurred at a particular time, at a particular place, in a particular way. We have the records: not just theirs but others too. As a result, we know more about Jesus Christ than of any other figure from the ancient world. Indeed, it’s this very historicity that should give us today even greater joy and conviction in the truth of what we celebrate.

But we can look at the Crib in another way. It’s the way of St. John, who wants to tell us the meaning of Christmas. The Baby born in a Bethlehem outhouse in winter 1 BC is God the Son. He is the Word *through Whom all things were made*, this vast universe with its myriad stars and distant galaxies. He is *the Light that shines in the darkness*, giving humans meaning and purpose. He is the *Lamb of God*, Who one day will lay down His life on the Cross *for us and for our salvation*. He is *the Bread of Life*, Who feeds us on our altars, freeing us from sin, sadness, suffering and death. If St. Matthew and St. Luke present the events, St. John wants us to grasp their amazing and profound meaning. For Christmas changes everything, not just the course of human history, with all the ancient prophecies fulfilled. Christmas changes life for you and me. For in that Child lies our own happiness, the fulfilment of all our own hopes and desires. Jesus loves us; He willed us to be born, to be alive, to inhabit this particular time and place. He wants us to follow Him, to live our lives in union with Him, and one day to be with Him forever in Paradise. That is why when we see Him in the Crib, we see not only the Word made flesh, but our flesh made Word, made divine. It’s this we celebrate today.

*Today, a Saviour has been born for us; He is Christ the Lord.*2021 has been a strange year, for many of us a devastating year, with loved ones sick, businesses ruined, trade and travel disrupted. In this Mass, which makes present the wondrous reality of Christmas in all its salvific meaning and value, let us pray for ourselves and our families for a better New Year ahead. Let us pray for a speedy end to the pandemic, and for all the medical staff and key workers who generously serve us. We pray for our country, for our government leaders and politicians, for migrants and refugees, for peace on earth, for the poor and the homeless. Today as we hurry to Bethlehem to pay Him homage, we thank God for the gift of our Catholic faith. May the Blessed Mother bring those who lack faith closer to her Son and may St. Joseph win from Him a deeper faith for us.

*Venite adoremus*: I wish you, your family and friends, a happy Christmas!