

**Thursday 22 January, 2009**  
**Mass for the Unborn**  
**Shrine of the Immaculate Conception**  
***Atlanta, Georgia***

✠ Wilton D. Gregory,  
*Archbishop of Atlanta*

**“A SON IS GIVEN”**

*“For a child is born to us, a son is given us.”* The original Christmas themes belong in a very special way to the Prophet Isaiah. Whatsoever the case may be Isaiah was given the prophetic wisdom to glimpse at God’s design for our salvation. Isaiah foretold that in God’s design: *a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son* and the frequent heartfelt images of the peace that will come upon the earth with the appearance of the Savior still touch our hearts. We are still near enough to Christmas to recall the wonder of the season when we give thanks for the birth of the Infant in Bethlehem.

His conception was announced by an angel – to an unwed young Woman. His parents did not have the means to provide a home to which to bring this baby. They were all too much like frightened young people who today may find themselves expecting a baby and yet without the means to provide for the child. Nonetheless, this Child is the very promise of hope for all ages.

It is not because we are still near the Christmas Mystery that this reading from Isaiah is appropriate for this Mass. It is because we come together to pray for all children conceived as gifts. Perhaps gifts that come with challenges as when young people find themselves expecting babies without the benefit or the means to properly care for them, but gifts none the less. The horrors that we have endured during the past nearly four decades is that our nation – and too many other nations have forgotten that life is a gift – one that we receive from the hand of God.

Human life is precious even when it may be unexpected or even the result of heartbreaking decisions. Human life is given to us not for experimentation or spare parts but as a treasure that reflects the image of God in which each life is cast. Isaiah's words dare to remind us of the preciousness each life and not just about that special Son who was given for Life Eternal, but each life that is conceived no matter what the circumstances. As we offer the Eucharist this day, let us continue to pray for a renewal of our ability to respect, reverence, and receive each life as the gift that it is. Not just within the womb but in each moment of its existence.

Isaiah understood and had the courage to proclaim that life is a gift – even under the most unusual conditions. Even when that Child who would eventually appear rejected, beaten, and badly treated during His passion, He was still gift for us and sacred beyond our meager ability to see His glory. So is every child's life sacred even when we cannot see its value or recognize its dignity. Human life comes as gift and it never loses its value – even when we fail to see it or recognize it as Isaiah said so well so long ago.