

Christmas Message

THE WORD

Year C • Psalter Week 1

A SAVIOUR IS BORN, CHRIST THE LORD!

(LUKE 2:1-14, 15-20)



The reading from the Prologue of John's Gospel occurs on the second Sunday after Christmas, so we might focus today on the extracts from the Gospel of Luke which are given for the Masses during the Night and at Dawn: these describe the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and the visit of the shepherds.

Joseph and Mary have to travel to Bethlehem to be registered with the Roman authorities. Bethlehem is the city associated with King David, and the Messiah was expected to be of David's line. It was therefore not fitting that the heir to the promises to David should be lodged in what we would consider a motel, a temporary shelter for travellers: hence the child was born and laid in a stone feeding trough used by animals. The swaddling clothes in which the child is wrapped remind the reader of David's son Solomon and, along with the manger, look ahead to the burial of Jesus after his crucifixion.

The birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of Mary's positive decision to accept her place in God's plan. Luke will later show her as the model disciple, the one who listens to God's word, meditates upon it and puts it into practice.

The shepherds anticipate the theme in the Gospel of God's concern for those who are marginalised and excluded from the normal religious and social life of the community. Their nomadic lifestyle meant that they could not fulfil the expected ritual obligations and, like all groups on the periphery, they were regarded with suspicion by the town dwellers and blamed when anything went missing. But it is to these characters that the divine message of the birth of the Messiah is given. They then become bearers of God's revelation to others, including Mary, "who treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart". ■

LEARN

The Infancy Narratives are composed of the first two chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

They are, more or less, completely different and we should read them on their own terms: they are theological documents rather than history or biography.

In these chapters, the evangelists present their belief about the person of Jesus.

DO

Set out your crib figures or visit the scene in your church: reflect on the fact that God was prepared to come into our world as a child for your sake.



SAY

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to God's people
on earth!

REFLECT

There was an outcry some years ago when the Christmas Day special edition of *Downton Abbey* ended with the tragic death of Matthew Crawley in a traffic accident. Admittedly, this does seem to be a somewhat insensitive ending to the Christmas episode of a popular drama. But perhaps we might reflect today on the fact that the Gospel stories surrounding the birth of Jesus are overtures to the main narrative: the evangelists, Luke and Matthew, are stating themes which they will develop in their accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus.

The greatest danger to understanding the Infancy Narratives is sentimentality. The Victorian carols and hymns which are so popular are very pleasant. But the earlier medieval hymns for the Christmas period all have the shadow of the cross over them. "The Holly and the Ivy" is a good example of this writing.

It is all very well to concentrate on the child Jesus, but Luke is hinting that we need to keep in mind what this birth will entail. The shepherds' reaction to their experience is to "praise and glorify God": we might do the same, not just on account of the birth of Jesus, but for all God has done for us in and through Jesus. ■

MASS DURING THE NIGHT**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

The Lord said to me: You are my Son.
It is I who have begotten you this day.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

COLLECT

O God, who have made this most sacred night
radiant with the splendour of the true light,
grant, we pray, that we, who have known the
mysteries of his light on earth,
may also delight in his gladness in heaven...
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 9:1-7

PSALM

Psalm 95

Response:

Today a saviour has been born to us:
he is Christ the Lord.

SECOND READING

Titus 2:11-14

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

I bring you news of great joy:
today a saviour has been born to us, Christ
the Lord.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Luke 2:1-14

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
(all kneel during the next three lines)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,

and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the oblation of this day's feast
be pleasing to you, O Lord, we pray,
that through this most holy exchange
we may be found in the likeness of Christ,
in whom our nature is united to you...
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

The Word became flesh, and we have seen
his glory.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant us, we pray, O Lord our God,
that we, who are gladdened by participation
in the feast of our Redeemer's Nativity,
may through an honourable way of life
become worthy of union with him...
Amen.

MASS AT DAWN**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Today a light will shine upon us, for the Lord
is born for us;
and he will be called Wondrous God,
Prince of peace, Father of future ages:
and his reign will be without end.

COLLECT

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that, as we are bathed in the new radiance of
your incarnate Word,
the light of faith, which illumines our minds,
may also shine through in our deeds...
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 62:11-12

PSALM

Psalm 96

Response:

This day new light will shine upon the earth:
the Lord is born for us.

SECOND READING

Titus 3:4-7

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace to men who enjoy his favour.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Luke 2:15-20

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May our offerings be worthy, we pray, O Lord,
of the mysteries of the Nativity this day,
that, just as Christ was born a man and also
shone forth as God,

so these earthly gifts may confer on us what
is divine...
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Rejoice, O Daughter Zion; lift up praise,
Daughter Jerusalem;
Behold, your King will come, the Holy One
and Saviour of the world.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant us, Lord, as we honour with joyful
devotion
the Nativity of your Son,
that we may come to know with fullness of
faith
the hidden depths of this mystery
and to love them ever more and more...
Amen.

MASS DURING THE DAY**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

A child is born for us, and a son is given to us;
his sceptre of power rests upon his shoulder,
and his name will be called Messenger of
great counsel.

COLLECT

O God, who wonderfully created the dignity
of human nature
and still more wonderfully restored it,
grant, we pray,
that we may share in the divinity of Christ,
who humbled himself to share in our
humanity...
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 52:7-10

PSALM

Psalm 97

Response:

All the ends of the earth have seen the salva-
tion of our God.

SECOND READING

Hebrews 1:1-6

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

A hallowed day has dawned upon us.
Come, you nations, worship the Lord,
for today a great light has shone down upon
the earth.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

John 1:1-18

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Make acceptable, O Lord, our oblation on this
solemn day,
when you manifested the reconciliation
that makes us wholly pleasing in your sight
and inaugurated for us the fullness of divine
worship...
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

All the ends of the earth have seen the
salvation of our God.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant, O merciful God,
that, just as the Saviour of the world, born
this day,
is the author of divine generation for us,
so he may be the giver even of immortality...
Amen.