

Scripture Study

Nativity of the Lord (Midnight Mass) – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Isaiah 9:1-6

(Ps 96:1-3, 11-13)

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

Overview of the Gospel:

- In this Gospel, we contemplate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The Nativity (birth) of our Lord is the third Joyful Mystery of the Most Holy Rosary.
- Luke, the author of the third Gospel, takes great pains to make it clear that the birth, life and ministry of Jesus were actual events that took place in a certain place and time of history (verses 1-3; 1:1-5; 3:1-2) in contrast to the pagan religions of the time that were based on non-historical myths.
- Jesus is also implicitly contrasted with the mighty earthly ruler of the time, Caesar Augustus who was proclaimed “god” and “lord,” and who brought a type of earthly peace (the *Pax Romanus*) to the known world. Jesus, however, born in a stable in an obscure backwater province, was the true king who would bring peace, not as the world thinks of peace, but the peace of reconciliation between God and man, estranged by man’s sin.
- The angels who announce the birth of Jesus say a remarkable amount about him in one short verse (verse 11): He was born Savior (saving us from our sins); he is the Messiah (the promised, anointed one foretold in the Old Testament); he is Lord (a term in the Old Testament which God always chose for himself).

Questions:

- In the 2nd Reading, what does St. Paul say God has done for us through Jesus Christ (verses 11-12, 14)? What are we yet awaiting? What does that mean for how we are to live now?
- What was the legal meaning of the term “first-born” in ancient society (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 3:12-13; Luke 2:23)? What does the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* say about Jesus’ birth to the Virgin Mary (CCC 499-507)?
- How does the shepherd’s experience with the angels compare to that of Zechariah (Luke 1:8-9)? With Mary’s (vv 1:26-27)?
- Of all the people the angels could have visited, why did God send them to the shepherds? How does that relate to what Mary says in her *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55)?
- God appeared to Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds during what seemed like ordinary times of their lives. How has God spoken to you in the everyday flow of your life?
- What does the word “peace” in the angels’ hymn mean? How does the “peace to those on whom his favor rests” apply to you? Do you enjoy that peace? If so, how can you grow in it? If not, how can you enter it?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 437, 515, 525, 725

Closing prayer

As by the Word of God, Jesus our Savior was Flesh, and had both Flesh and blood for our salvation, so also the food which has been blessed by the word of prayer instituted by Him is both the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Incarnate. –St. Justin Martyr (c.100—165 A.D.)

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!

The birth of the Messiah

Scripture: *Luke 2:1-20*

Meditation: In the Roman Empire censuses were taken every fourteen years for assessing taxation and ascertaining who were eligible for compulsory military service. Joseph and Mary traveled eighty miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This was a most inconvenient time and a physical ordeal for Mary since her baby was due any day now! And as luck would have it, Bethlehem was overcrowded. They had to settle for the most primitive of accommodations -- an open stall for animals. Why would the Messiah have to be born in such pitiable conditions and in total obscurity? God's ways are different from our ways. He, the Most Exalted One, condescends for the sake of the lowly and the oppressed. The Lord descended not in pomp and majesty befitting a King, but in meekness and lowliness to show us the way of perfect love. The only room for Jesus was the cross he came to bear for our sins. In Jesus lowly birth we see the foreshadowing of the greatest sacrifice God would make for our sake when his only begotten Son willingly embraced death on the cross for our salvation.

Mary and Joseph were both from the line of David, King of Israel. Jesus's birth in Bethlehem fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah would descend from David and be born in David's city, Bethlehem (Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1-2; Micah 5:2-4). Why did the angels announce the birth of the new-born King of Israel to shepherds, rather than to the Jewish populace at large or to the leaders of Israel? God chose to come in lowliness to show his loving-kindness and power to those who were humble of heart and ready to receive him. Does the Lord find an



eager welcome in your heart and home?

Why did the Word of God become flesh? In the Creed we profess that "For our sake and for our salvation he came down from heaven". Augustine, the great 4th century bishop said: *Closed in darkness, it was necessary to bring us the light; captives, we awaited a Savior; prisoners, help; slaves, a liberator. Are these things minor or insignificant? Did they not move God to descend to human nature and visit it, since humanity was in so miserable and unhappy a state?* Jesus is true God and true man. *The Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. The Son of God ...worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin (Gaudium et Spes).*

What is the significance of the Incarnation for us? The Word became flesh for us in order to save

us by reconciling us with God our Father. *God loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). The Father sent his Son as the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). The Word appeared to take away sins (1 John 3:5). The Word became flesh that we might know and experience the love of God. God's love was revealed to us in the way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him (1 John 4:9). For God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).*

There is a great paradox in the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God taking on human flesh that we might be clothed in his divinity. Scripture says "he became poor that we might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9) - rich not in material things which pass away, but rich in the things that last -- eternal life and happiness with the Triune God-- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Incarnation is the mystery of this marvelous exchange: "O marvelous exchange! Man's Creator has become man, born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity." (*Antiphon I of Evening Prayer for January 1st*)

"Lord our God, with the birth of your Son, your glory breaks on the world. As we celebrate his first coming, give us a foretaste of the joy that you will grant us when the fullness of his glory has filled the earth."

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