

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

O people of Zion, behold,  
the Lord will come to save the nations,  
and the Lord will make the glory of his voice  
heard  
in the joy of your heart.

**COLLECT**

Almighty and merciful God,  
may no earthly undertaking hinder those  
who set out in haste to meet your Son,  
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom  
gain us admittance to his company.  
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING**

Baruch 5:1-9

A reading from the prophet Baruch.  
Jerusalem, take off your dress of sorrow and  
distress,  
put on the beauty of the glory of God for ever,  
wrap the cloak of the integrity of God around  
you,  
put the diadem of the glory of the Eternal on  
your head:  
since God means to show your splendour to  
every nation under heaven,  
since the name God gives you for ever will be,  
“Peace through integrity, and honour through  
devotedness”.

Arise, Jerusalem, stand on the heights  
and turn your eyes to the east:  
see your sons reassembled from west and  
east  
at the command of the Holy One, jubilant that  
God has remembered them.  
Though they left you on foot,  
with enemies for an escort,  
now God brings them back to you  
like royal princes carried back in glory.  
For God has decreed the flattening  
of each high mountain, of the everlasting hills,  
the filling of the valleys to make the ground  
level  
so that Israel can walk in safety under the  
glory of God.  
And the forests and every fragrant tree will  
provide shade  
for Israel at the command of God;  
for God will guide Israel in joy by the light of  
his glory  
with his mercy and integrity for escort.  
The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 125

Response:

**What marvels the Lord worked for us!  
Indeed we were glad.**

- When the Lord delivered Zion from  
bondage,  
it seemed like a dream.  
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,  
on our lips there were songs. (R.)
- The heathens themselves said: “What  
marvels  
the Lord worked for them!”  
What marvels the Lord worked for us!  
Indeed we were glad. (R.)
- Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage  
as streams in dry land.  
Those who are sowing in tears  
will sing when they reap. (R.)

- They go out, they go out, full of tears  
carrying seed for the sowing:  
they come back, they come back, full of  
song,  
carrying their sheaves. (R.)

**SECOND READING** Philippians 1:3-6, 8-11

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the  
Philippians.

Every time I pray for all of you, I pray with  
joy, remembering how you have helped to  
spread the Good News from the day you first  
heard it right up to the present. I am quite  
certain that the One who began this good  
work in you will see that it is finished when  
the Day of Christ Jesus comes. God knows  
how much I miss you all, loving you as Christ  
Jesus loves you. My prayer is that your love  
for each other may increase more and more  
and never stop improving your knowledge  
and deepening your perception so that you  
can always recognise what is best. This will  
help you to become pure and blameless, and  
prepare you for the Day of Christ, when you  
will reach the perfect goodness which Jesus  
Christ produces in us for the glory and praise  
of God.

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!  
Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight,  
and all mankind shall see the salvation of  
God.  
Alleluia!

**GOSPEL**

Luke 3:1-6

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Luke.

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's  
reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor  
of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his  
brother Philip tetrarch of the lands of  
Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch  
of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas  
and Caiaphas, the word of God came to  
John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.  
He went through the whole Jordan district  
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the  
forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book  
of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice cries in the wilderness;  
Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight.  
Every valley will be filled in,  
every mountain and hill be laid low,  
winding ways will be straightened  
and rough roads made smooth.  
And all mankind shall see the salvation of  
God.

The Gospel of the Lord.  
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**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 bow 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**

Be pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers  
and offerings,  
and, since we have no merits to plead our  
cause,  
come, we pray, to our rescue  
with the protection of your mercy.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

**Jerusalem, arise and stand upon the heights,  
and behold the joy which comes to you from  
God.**

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Replenished by the food of spiritual  
nourishment,  
we humbly beseech you, O Lord,  
that, through our partaking in this mystery,  
you may teach us to judge wisely the things  
of earth  
and hold firm to the things of heaven.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

.....  
Mother of Christ! Hear thou thy people's cry,  
Star of the deep, and portal of the sky!  
Mother of him who thee from nothing made,  
Sinking we strive and call to thee for aid;  
Oh, by that joy which Gabriel brought to thee,  
Thou Virgin first and last, let us thy mercy see.  
*Antiphon to Our Lady for Advent and  
Christmas*

**THE WORD**

Statue of St John the Baptist on the Charles Bridge in Prague, Czech Republic

**John the Baptist is the major figure in this year's Advent Gospel readings. Today's passage is the beginning of Luke's account of the ministry of Jesus, and John the Baptist appears at this point in all four evangelists' versions.**

Luke situates the call of the Baptist in the context of world history, referring to the Roman emperor, the civil rulers of Palestine and the religious leaders of the people of Israel. He mentions that John is the “son of Zechariah”, thus reminding us of the promises about this person made in the earlier account of his conception and birth.

John is the one preparing the way for the Lord: he presents this in terms of constructing a straight and level road along which a royal person can travel in a fit and comfortable manner. This sorting out of the landscape indicates the people's inner conversion, their sorting out of their lives, which they declare publicly by being baptised, undergoing ritual immersion in the river Jordan and having their sins forgiven. But the Baptist is not simply offering automatic pardon: he calls for a change of attitude and outlook, which is the underlying meaning of the biblical call to repentance. ■

**REFLECT**

Advent is one of the two Christian seasons of penance as we prepare for a major feast: the other is Lent, which we associate more readily with penitential practices. There are purple vestments, and no Gloria at Mass. John the Baptist, who will also appear prominently in the next two weeks' Gospel readings, is the herald of the arrival of Jesus and calls on his listeners to make themselves ready to welcome the Messiah.

John's preaching centres on a radical change in the way in which people think: the word *metanoia* (repentance) does

not mean feeling sorry about wrong behaviour – although that may well be one result. It means adopting a different way in which we view ourselves, other people and our manner of living. Levelling hills and filling in valleys is a poetic way of presenting the task facing us: Advent is a time to think about the coming of Christ into our lives here and now and an invitation to remove the obstacles to receiving the Lord wholeheartedly at Christmas, as this means accepting “the salvation of God” which he offers.

However, once we have identified our shortcomings as disciples of Jesus, we

**LEARN**

*Metanoia* is the New Testament term for repentance.

*Metanoia* means changing our way of thinking, our attitude.

Advent is very much the Marian season, when we think about Mary as the model disciple, one who listens to the word of God, meditates upon it and puts it into practice.

**SAY**

**Prepare a way for the Lord:  
make his paths straight.  
(Isaiah 40:3; Luke 3:4)**

**DO**

Take out the crib figure of Mary and place it in a prominent place where it can be easily seen: think about Mary and her positive response to God's invitation.



**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.  
Indeed, the Lord is near.

**COLLECT**

O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

**FIRST READING** Zephaniah 3:14-18

A reading from the prophet Zephaniah.  
Shout for joy, daughter of Zion, Israel, shout aloud!  
Rejoice, exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem!  
The Lord has revealed your sentence; he has driven your enemies away.  
The Lord, the king of Israel, is in your midst; you have no more evil to fear.  
When that day comes, word will come to Jerusalem:  
Zion, have no fear, do not let your hands fall limp.  
The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior.  
He will exult with joy over you, he will renew you by his love; he will dance with shouts of joy for you as on a day of festival.  
The word of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM** Isaiah 12:2-6

Response:  
**Sing and shout for joy for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.**

1. Truly, God is my salvation, I trust, I shall not fear.  
For the Lord is my strength, my song, he became my saviour.  
With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. (R.)
2. Give thanks to the Lord, give praise to his name!  
Make his mighty deeds known to the peoples!  
Declare the greatness of his name. (R.)
3. Sing a psalm to the Lord for he has done glorious deeds, make them known to all the earth!  
People of Zion, sing and shout for joy for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. (R.)

**SECOND READING** Philippians 4:4-7

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Philippians.  
I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and

thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus.

The word of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!  
**The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor.**  
Alleluia!

**GOSPEL** Luke 3:10-18

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

When all the people asked John, "What must we do?" he answered, "If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same." There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, "Master, what must we do?" He said to them, "Exact no more than your rate." Some soldiers asked him in their turn, "What about us? What must we do?" He said to them, "No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!"

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, "I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals: he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out." As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

The Gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**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 bow 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 sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray, be offered to you unceasingly, to complete what was begun in sacred mystery and powerfully accomplish for us your saving work.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

**Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do not fear. Behold, our God will come, and he will save us.**

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

We implore your mercy, Lord, that this divine sustenance may cleanse us of our faults and prepare us for the coming feasts.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

The liturgical season of Advent has a twofold character. We think of it first of all as a time to prepare for Christmas, when Christ's first coming among us in human form will be remembered. Second, it is the season that prepares our minds and hearts for Christ's second coming at the end of time. The main note of our Advent liturgy is therefore devout and joyful expectation.

**THE WORD**

## WHAT MUST WE DO?

(LUKE 3:10-18)



In our Gospel extract today, we are given examples of the preaching of John the Baptist. He was someone who attracted a great following, including civic officials and members of the armed forces.

Luke presents John as a person of great importance, with an urgent message: however, he is not the main character in the Gospel story. Throughout the Infancy Narrative, the evangelist showed him as occupying a lesser place to that of Jesus, and in our reading today, John explicitly rejects any suggestion that he himself might be the Messiah. He compares the baptism he offers with that of Jesus: John's comes through water; that of Jesus comes through the Holy Spirit and fire, which will be fulfilled, in Luke's writings, at Pentecost. Furthermore, John describes himself as an unworthy servant of the one to come, unfit to untie the laces of his sandals. ■

**REFLECT**

The execution of John the Baptist is recounted by Mark, in graphic and well-known detail, as the result of his denouncing Herod Antipas for marrying Herod's sister-in-law. But the first part of our reading today suggests another, probably more historically accurate reason. Among those who responded positively to John's preaching were tax collectors and soldiers. These were the officials on whom the smooth running of the state depended. If the Baptist were seen as having influence on such people, then he could be perceived as an alternative centre of power and so a threat to the central government. This would be a more plausible reason for John's being imprisoned and executed than his criticising the domestic arrangements of the local ruler, who could easily ignore his comments.

John the Baptist is an uncomfortable figure, very much in the mould of the Old Testament prophets. There are not often statues of the Baptist to be found on sale in repositories. The prophets were

suspicious and critical of institutional religion because, to them, it lulled people into a false sense of security: if someone fulfilled their religious duties, then they could consider themselves as being at rights with God, but the prophets taught that deeper values were – and are – at stake. So when John the Baptist called for repentance, he was in the line of the Hebrew and Israelite prophets and this is the message of Jesus, when he embarks on his ministry.

Who are the prophets today? It is tempting to think that the Holy Spirit works through the channels of the official Church, but this is not the message of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. John the Baptist was not a member of the official clergy, nor was Jesus, and their comments on the Temple and other religious authorities of their day make uncomfortable reading if we apply them to the present day. But "the word of the Lord stands for ever": there is a saying that the Church is always in need of reform. In Advent, during which John the Baptist is so prominent, we might reflect on that and listen to the other voices. ■

**DO**

Put out the crib figure of Joseph from your crib set: reflect on the response of Joseph as a young man to the call of the Lord.

**SAY**

Sing and shout for joy, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.  
(Isaiah 12:6)

**LEARN**

John the Baptist attracted followers from tax collectors and soldiers.

These were important figures for the efficient functioning of the state.

Therefore, the Baptist could be perceived as a threat to the central government and this may have been the reason for his arrest and subsequent execution.



Stained glass in the Church of Saint-Séverin, Paris, depicting the beheading of John the Baptist

# 19 DECEMBER 2021 Sunday Message

## THE WORD

### ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Drop down dew from above, you heavens, and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the earth be opened and bring forth a Saviour.

### COLLECT

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### FIRST READING

Micah 5:1-4

A reading from the prophet Micah.

The Lord says this:

You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, out of you will be born for me the one who is to rule over Israel; his origin goes back to the distant past, to the days of old. The Lord is therefore going to abandon them till the time when she who is to give birth gives birth. Then the remnant of his brothers will come back to the sons of Israel. He will stand and feed his flock with the power of the Lord, with the majesty of the name of his God. They will live secure, for from then on he will extend his power to the ends of the land. He himself will be peace.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

### PSALM

Psalms 79

Response:

God of hosts, bring us back; let your face shine on us and we shall be saved.

1. O shepherd of Israel, hear us, shine forth from your cherubim throne. O Lord, rouse up your might, O Lord, come to our help. (R.)
2. God of hosts, turn again, we implore, look down from heaven and see. Visit this vine and protect it, the vine your right hand has planted. (R.)
3. May your hand be on the man you have chosen, the man you have given your strength. And we shall never forsake you again: give us life that we may call upon your name. (R.)

### SECOND READING

Hebrews 10:5-10

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

This is what Christ said, on coming into the world:

You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me.

You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sin: then I said, just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book, "God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will."

Notice that he says first: You did not want what the Law lays down as the things to be offered, that is: the sacrifices, the oblations, the holocausts and the sacrifices for sin, and you took no pleasure in them; and then he says: Here I am! I am coming to obey your will. He is abolishing the first sort to replace it with the second. And this will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

I am the handmaid of the Lord: let what you have said be done to me. Alleluia!

### GOSPEL

Luke 1:39-45

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

### 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 bow 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 Holy Spirit, O Lord, sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar, just as he filled with his power the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son; and his name will be called Emmanuel.

### PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Having received this pledge of eternal redemption, we pray, almighty God, that, as the feast day of our salvation draws ever nearer, so we may press forward all the more eagerly to the worthy celebration of the mystery of your Son's Nativity. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Father, Ruler of the Universe, from the very beginning of time you have shown your love for us, and most of all when you sent your Son as our Saviour. Bless all who look upon this crib. May it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus, and raise our thoughts to him, who is God-with-us and our Saviour who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing of Crib



Fresco at the Sanctuary of the Visitation in Ein Kerem, Israel, depicting Mary's meeting with Elizabeth

The first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke are a highly artistically constructed series of five scenes (this excludes the later one of the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple) and the central event is the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, both pregnant, with Jesus and John the Baptist respectively.

The reason for Mary's visit to her cousin is not, as often supposed, out of concern for her welfare or an act of kindness or charity, but rather is part of the stereotyped account of the annunciation of the birth of a significant person in the divine plan. The final and sixth element in the narrative is the giving of a sign. In this context, the sign is the confirmation of the divine or angelic word: it is an assurance that the person receiving the message has not dreamed or imagined it. Thus, Elizabeth's being pregnant is the sign to Mary that Gabriel's communication was genuine. Mary's visit is to confirm that she has understood correctly her experience with God's messenger. This is the only scene in which the two mothers meet: the unborn John the Baptist gives testimony to the arrival of the child Jesus, just as later he will proclaim the coming of the Messiah. Elizabeth hails the arrival of "the mother of my Lord" and her words have passed into the Christian tradition as part of the most common and popular prayer to Mary. ■

### REFLECT

The scene of the visitation is the central occasion of Luke's Infancy Narrative, the first two chapters of his Gospel. It brings together the two mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, and their unborn children, John and Jesus. After this, they diverge and we are given the accounts of the birth of the two children. Always, Luke presents Jesus as superior to the Baptist. Elizabeth is cast in the mould of the mothers of important figures in Jewish tradition who are unable, for some unspecified reason, to conceive naturally, but by divine intervention are able eventually to give birth. Mary's virginal conception is of a different order: this to insist that Jesus is the Son of God and has no human father.

It is important to remember that the Gospels are theological documents: they are expressions of faith. While we might be inclined to see events such as the visitation in terms of human sympathy, there is much more at work, much more depth to figures such as Elizabeth and Mary than a surface reading of the text might suggest.

It is worth reflecting on Elizabeth's final words to Mary: "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled." In the Bible, the verb "to believe" can be understood as "to trust". Perhaps if we thought more about trusting God rather than simply believing in God, we might be closer to the attitude of Mary and Elizabeth and to that of Joseph and Zechariah. Luke is always emphasising the need to listen to the word. ■

### DO

Set out the figure of the shepherd from your crib set: reflect during the week on how seemingly ordinary people received news of the birth of the Messiah rather than official and educated individuals.



### LEARN

The point of Mary's visit to Elizabeth is to confirm Gabriel's message at the annunciation.

In biblical annunciation narratives, a sign is always given to assure the recipient that they have not imagined or dreamed their experience.

People who demand signs as proof are condemned: this is not the same as individuals, such as Mary, checking out signs that they have been given by the divine messenger.

### SAY

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women. (see Luke 1:28. 42)

**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.

# Christmas Message

## THE WORD



## 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". ■

## 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. ■

## 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!

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

The shepherds went in haste,  
and found Mary and Joseph and the Infant  
lying in a manger.

**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 were pleased to give us  
the shining example of the Holy Family,  
graciously grant that we may imitate them  
in practising the virtues of family life and in  
the bonds of charity,  
and so, in the joy of your house,  
delight one day in eternal rewards.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING** 1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28

A reading from the first book of Samuel.

Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son,  
and called him Samuel "since" she said "I  
asked the Lord for him."

When a year had gone by, the husband  
Elkanah went up again with all his family to  
offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to  
fulfil his vow. Hannah, however, did not go  
up, having said to her husband, "Not before  
the child is weaned. Then I will bring him and  
present him before the Lord and he shall stay  
there for ever."

When she had weaned him, she took him  
up with her together with a three-year-old  
bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and  
she brought him to the temple of the Lord at  
Shiloh; and the child was with them. They  
slaughtered the bull and the child's mother  
came to Eli. She said, "If you please, my lord.  
As you live, my lord, I am the woman who  
stood here beside you, praying to the Lord.  
This is the child I prayed for, and the Lord  
granted me what I asked him. Now I make  
him over to the Lord for the whole of his life.  
He is made over to the Lord."

There she left him, for the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 83

Response:

They are happy who dwell in your house,  
O Lord.

- How lovely is your dwelling place  
Lord, God of hosts.  
My soul is longing and yearning,  
is yearning for the courts of the Lord.  
My heart and my soul ring out their joy  
to God, the living God. (R.)
- They are happy, who dwell in your house,  
for ever singing your praise.  
They are happy, whose strength is in you;  
they walk with ever growing strength. (R.)
- O Lord, God of hosts, hear my prayer,  
give ear, O God of Jacob.  
Turn your eyes, O God, our shield,  
look on the face of your anointed. (R.)

**SECOND READING** 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

A reading from the first letter of St John.

Think of the love that the Father has lavished  
on us,  
by letting us be called God's children;  
and that is what we are.

Because the world refused to acknowledge  
him,  
therefore it does not acknowledge us.  
My dear people, we are already the children  
of God  
but what we are to be in the future has not  
yet been revealed,  
all we know is, that when it is revealed  
we shall be like him  
because we shall see him as he really is.

My dear people,  
if we cannot be condemned by our own  
conscience,  
we need not be afraid in God's presence,  
and whatever we ask him  
we shall receive,  
because we keep his commandments  
and live the kind of life that he wants.  
His commandments are these:  
that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus  
Christ

and that we love one another  
as he told us to.

Whoever keeps his commandments  
lives in God and God lives in him.

We know that he lives in us  
by the Spirit that he has given us.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!  
Open our heart, O Lord,  
to accept the words of your Son.  
Alleluia!

**GOSPEL**

Luke 2:41-52

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Luke.

Every year the parents of Jesus used to go  
to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover.  
When he was twelve years old, they went  
up for the feast as usual. When they were  
on their way home after the feast, the boy  
Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without  
his parents knowing it. They assumed he  
was with the caravan, and it was only after a

day's journey that they went to look for him  
among their relations and acquaintances.  
When they failed to find him they went back  
to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere.

Three days later, they found him in the  
Temple, sitting among the doctors, listening  
to them and asking them questions; and all  
those who heard him were astounded at  
his intelligence and his replies. They were  
overcome when they saw him, and his  
mother said to him, "My child, why have you  
done this to us? See how worried your father  
and I have been, looking for you." "Why were  
you looking for me?" he replied. "Did you not  
know that I must be busy with my Father's  
affairs?" But they did not understand what he  
meant.

He then went down with them and came to  
Nazareth and lived under their authority. His  
mother stored up all these things in her heart.  
And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature,  
and in favour with God and men.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of God the  
Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge the living  
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting.  
Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

We offer you, Lord, the sacrifice of  
conciliation,  
humbly asking that,  
through the intercession of the Virgin Mother  
of God and Saint Joseph,  
you may establish our families firmly in your  
grace and your peace.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

Our God has appeared on the earth, and  
lived among us.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Bring those you refresh with this heavenly  
Sacrament,  
most merciful Father,  
to imitate constantly the example of the Holy  
Family,  
so that, after the trials of this world,  
we may share their company for ever.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**THE WORD**

The colourful and poignant episode which we find in our Gospel reading today is only recounted in the Gospel of Luke. The evangelist uses it as a bridge between the account of the birth of Jesus and the beginning of his adult ministry.

He emphasises the religious observance of the couple described as "the parents of Jesus", who were accustomed to making an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the feast of Passover. On this occasion, the twelve-year-old Jesus decides to remain behind without informing them. They discover him in the Temple, teaching the teachers.

In spite of all the information that they have received, which we have considered over the Christmas period, about the nature of the child to be born, Mary and Joseph fail to understand Jesus' rather enigmatic reply to his mother's relieved but exasperated question, "Why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you." He answers, rather abruptly, about being "busy with my Father's affairs". This failure to understand what Jesus says will recur in the Gospel narrative.

This incident is bracketed in Luke's Gospel by notices about Jesus growing up in Nazareth: the verse immediately preceding today's extract says that "he grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom and God's favour was with him". This wisdom is illustrated in his discussions with the teachers of the Law in the Temple. After that Jesus "went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority". Jesus' human nature is very much emphasised in these passages. ■

**REFLECT**

Today, a child of twelve is embarking on secondary school. At the time of Jesus, a boy of twelve was probably considered able to undertake adult responsibility in religious matters and to be responsible for any vow he might make. So this story is not simply about a lost child. Only a parent can fully understand the feelings of Mary and Joseph on discovering that Jesus was missing from the company with whom they were travelling.

This story is highly charged from an emotional point of view. There is a missing child: a frantic search by anxious parents; the eventual relief at discovering that the boy is safe and sound; the perplexity at his precocious talent in holding an apparently impressive discussion with well-qualified experts in their own field. Then there is the first indication that the adolescent has a mind of his own, that he senses a calling of which his parents have no inkling or understanding, but the family relationship continues until the appropriate time.

To be a married person, a parent, is just as much a vocation as to be a priest or religious sister or brother, and just as demanding – or more so. This feast reminds us that most Christians are called to be committed partners in marriage and parenthood, and should be honoured as such. Like Mary, maybe we should "store up all these things in our hearts". ■

Nativity scene from front façade of the  
Cathedral of St Wenceslas in Olomouc,  
Czech Republic

**SAY**

Blessed are those who fear  
the Lord and walk in his  
ways.  
(Psalm 127:1)

**LEARN**

The average life expectancy at the time of  
Jesus was around 35 years.

A boy (*sic*) of twelve was considered able to  
undertake adult religious responsibilities.

The depiction of Joseph as an elderly man  
has no basis in the Gospel tradition.

**DO**

Put out your crib figures of Mary, Joseph  
and the child Jesus. Reflect that most  
Christians are called to live out our faith as  
married and family members.

