



SUNDAY REFLECTION

The overriding theme in today's liturgy is that God is with us. Isaiah speaks about a Son that will be born who will be given the name Emmanuel. It takes faith to believe that a child will represent the new presence of God in our world and even stronger faith that the Lord is with us in times of doubt and turmoil.

The message that Paul, the apostle, will bring to the Roman community identifies Jesus as the Son of God, special and chosen in the eyes of God and revered by believers for His holiness and the Good News He preached. Those who listen and accept the word of the Lord are called saints for they are filled with the grace and peace of Christ. The entire letter of introduction to Rome will spell out the meaning of Christ in salvation history and the practical implications for Christians. Equality, unity, acceptance, and hope will characterize this community because that is the message Jesus lived and died for. If the Risen Lord is with us, then Gospel values must be lived by individuals and the community.

Matthew's introductory chapter is the culmination of the promises of the prophets, especially Isaiah. Mary and Joseph are flesh and blood people who hear the word of God and act accordingly. They are the means and the message of the wonderful truth that God is with us. We have been waiting in this Advent period to experience the new birth of the Lord in our lives. We have listened to the Scriptures pronounce and announce the fact of a new step in salvation

history. The tradition and promises of Scripture come to fruition in the birth of Jesus that we will celebrate in a few days.

Let us reflect on how seriously we take the promise that God is with us in the person, Jesus. Do we, like Paul, preach the Good News with our words and actions? Do our families honor and respect every member as we see in the commitment and love of Mary and Joseph? There is so much to celebrate in this season of joy and so much challenge as we reflect on the biblical message.

STEWARDSHIP: When he discovered that Mary was with child, Joseph resolved to end their engagement with as little disgrace as possible. But obedient to the voice of God, he changed those plans and became instead the protector of the child Jesus and His mother, Mary. God grant that I may be as open to the leading of the Holy Spirit!

READINGS FOR CHRISTMAS

24 – 25 DEC '19

Is. 9:1-7: A prophecy that there will be light for those who have been in darkness. The works of darkness will be overcome. Light will come with the birth of a child. The child, of the lineage of King David, will bring the reign of justice and peace to the world.

Tit. 2:11-14: The grace of God is given not just to this or that people but to the whole human race. Grace is a call to live for God in a way that has been made possible for all by the coming of the Savior. It brings with it hope of a blessedness to come when the Savior appears again.

Lk. 2:1-14: WE are told in quite human terms about the time and place of the birth of Mary's child. But then the Angels and shepherds lift our minds to the wonder of who this child is – Savior, Christ the Lord – and to the way God will be glorified in Him and peace brought to the world.

READING FOR DAWN MASS OF CHRISTMAS

Is. 62:11-12: The Savior comes to set His people free – free to be open to all who search for God.

Tit. 3:4-7: We must respond to the graciousness of God by being open to the Spirit of God – just as active in our re-birth through Baptism as in the birth of Jesus.

Lk. 2:15-20: It was time for the shepherds to go and see the truth of what they had heard from the angels. It is time for us to go and see in the light of faith what we have heard about the happenings at Bethlehem, and to do so with Mary.

READINGS FOR MASS DURING THE DAY OF CHRISTMAS

Isa. 52:7-10: Here is a prophecy of homecoming and security. Home is where God is, and where God is there is room for everyone.

Heb. 1:1-6: What is given to us at Christmas is God's last word. It is God Himself who speaks to us in the person of His Son, the Son who came among us and is speaking on our behalf today in heaven.

Jn. 1:1-18: St. John brings us behind the story of Bethlehem, back to where it began in the eternal being of God. The Word, co-eternal with God and through whom everything was made, comes into the created world to give it a new beginning and to be Himself a new light in it. In

Him, the Word made flesh, the glory of God finally shines in its fullness and of that fullness we have all received.

READINGS FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

28 – 29 DEC '19

Sir. 3:2-6, 12-14: A writer from the Jewish wisdom tradition encourages ongoing respect for parents.

Col. 3:12-21: An early Christian writer lists qualities that should be present in any Christian community – kindness, forbearance, patience, love. He adds in advice copies from Greek household codes.

Mt. 2:13-15, 19-23: Joseph is guided by God to protect the family He forms with Mary and with Jesus.

MARY THE THIRD FIGURES OF ADVENT

Mary in peril

The season of Advent builds to its presentation of Mary. Because of our familiarity with the gospel on the fourth Sunday, we may have become hardened to the seriousness of what is happening here. Joseph is about to divorce Mary because he presumes she has committed adultery. Mary has been found to be pregnant before she and Joseph have lived together as husband and wife. Joseph is described as “an upright man,” which means he lived as an observer of the Law of Moses. Taken strictly, this Law demanded that anyone who committed adultery should be stoned.

There was a more lenient “out” that could be taken, and that was a quiet divorce. This is what Joseph was going to do. Because he was a merciful man, he was not going to have a public trial in which Mary would be accused of her crime. The gospel tells us that “he was unwilling to expose her to public disgrace.” We might wonder how much comfort this would have given to a very young pregnant Jewish woman. At this point, fortunately, Joseph has a dream. More fortunately, he listens to it.

Mary’s silent hope

Though our attention is centered on Joseph, Mary is equally central – the silent, pregnant Mary. She is present as one waiting in hope for God to act. For there is no other means to go on with life, drawing on the inner strength, the presence of the living God. It alerts us to the possibility of facing total darkness in a spirit of hope. Angels come in God’s good time.

The pregnant Mary reminds us that new life comes at its own rate of growth, according to laws that do not yield to a desire for quick results. She speaks to all of us caught up in a fast-paced world. In a culture that disposes quickly of what isn’t working, that has little patience with either fragility or weakness, Mary reminds us that we have to wait for some things.

Like her, we may be called to witness to a God who works in the fullness of time, which can be excruciatingly slow for those who live by a schedule. But God proves to be a God of new life, a God who is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Advent presents us with three companions. Each speaks to us of waiting – in desperation, in excitement, in silent hope. During a season when we can become easily frazzled and anxious about many things, when loneliness and loss can threaten to overwhelm us, we can know that we are not alone. We have with us, among others, a faith-filled trio who point toward an abiding Presence who continues to breathe the divine Spirit into us, bringing to new birth sons and daughters of the living God.

ICON: OUR LADY OF THE SIGN

The icon of Our Lady of the Sign is an icon of the Most Holy Virgin, called “Theotokos” , Mother of God. This term, appeared in the region of Alexandria, Egypt in the first half of the 3rd century. In 431 at the Council of Ephesus (Turkey), the council Fathers formally declared Mary, the Mother of God.

The imagery of this icons is based on the words of the Prophet Isaiah’s message, “Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son, and will call Him Emmanuel (meaning, God with us.)” Is. 7:14

The title of this icon is the term for a particular type of icon of the Theotokos (Virgin Mary), facing the viewer directly, depicted either full length or half, with her hands raised in the *orans* (prayer) position, and with the image of the Child Jesus depicted within a round aureole upon her breast. This type of image was already evident in the catacombs of the first Christians.

The icon depicts the Theotokos during the Annunciation at the moment of saying, “May it be done to me according to Your word.” (Lk.1:38)

The image of the Christ child represents Him at the moment of His conception in the womb of the Virgin. He is depicted not as a fetus, but rather vested in divine robes, and often holding a scroll, symbolic of His role as teacher. Sometimes His robes are gold or white, symbolizing divine glory; sometimes that are blue and red, symbolizing the two natures of Christ (divine and human). His face is depicted as that of an old man, indicating the Christian teaching that He was at one and the same time both a fully-human infant and fully the eternal God, one of the Trinity. His right hand is raised in blessing.

Mary is sometimes called “Platitera”, i.e. “Greater than Heaven”, since the Virgin has conceived in her womb Him whom the heavens can not contain. The three stars on the Virgin (forehead, right shoulder, left shoulder) signify that she was a virgin before, during and after the birth of Christ. She is dedicated to the coming of the Kingdom of the Son of God.



PRAYERS

Glory to God in the highest!

My precious Lord, Jesus,
I adore You with profound love and rejoice in the celebration of Your birth.
Your love for us is unfathomable,
it is glorious transforming, awe-inspiring, and deeply personal.
You chose to come and dwell among us,
being born into poverty, rejection and humility.
Yet Your mother knew whom she bore,
Her heart was filled with the tenderest love
as she adored her Child and her God.
Help me, dear Lord, to come to love You with the heart of Your mother.
Invite me to adore You with St. Joseph and the poor shepherds.
Reveal to me the glorious power of Your birth
and change my life on account of this perfect gift of Yourself.
I love You, dear Lord Jesus.
Help me to love You with all my heart.
Newborn Savior of the World, I trust in You.
Mother Mary and St. Joseph, pray for me and for all. Amen.

*“He was created of a mother whom He created.
He was carried by hands that He formed. He
cried in the manger in wordless infancy. He, the
Word, without whom all human eloquence is
mute.”*

St Augustine

CHRISTMAS
FEATURE

NOT JUST ONE DAY LONG



Some people tend to think of Christmas as being just December 25th, but the Christmas season lasts longer than that. According to the Church's Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, the official rule is this:

#33. Christmas Time runs from First Vespers (Evening Prayer I) of the Nativity of the Lord up to and including the Sunday after Epiphany or after 6 January*.

*#38. The Sunday falling after 6 January is the feast of the Baptism of the Lord

To simply put it, Christmas season begins at the Vigil Mass on Christmas Eve and ends on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

Lifted from "9 things you need to know about Christmas" by Jimmy Akin

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