

# 6 DECEMBER 2020 Sunday Message

2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Year B • Psalter Week 2

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

O people of Sion, 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,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING** Isaiah 40:1-5. 9-11

A reading from the prophet Isaiah  
"Console my people, console them"  
says your God.  
"Speak to the heart of Jerusalem  
and call to her  
that her time of service is ended,  
that her sin is atoned for,  
that she has received from the hand of the  
Lord  
double punishment for all her crimes."  
A voice cries, "Prepare in the wilderness  
a way for the Lord.  
Make a straight highway for our God  
across the desert.  
Let every valley be filled in,  
every mountain and hill be laid low,  
let every cliff become a plain,  
and the ridges a valley;  
then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed  
and all mankind shall see it;  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Go up on a high mountain,  
joyful messenger to Zion.  
Shout with a loud voice,  
joyful messenger to Jerusalem.  
Shout without fear,  
say to the towns of Judah,  
"Here is your God."

Here is the Lord coming with power,  
his arm subduing all things to him.  
The prize of his victory is with him,  
his trophies all go before him.  
He is like a shepherd feeding his flock,  
gathering lambs in his arms,  
holding them against his breast  
and leading to their rest the mother ewes.

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

**PSALM** Psalm 84

Response:

**Let us see, O Lord, your mercy  
and give us your saving help.**

- I will hear what the Lord God has to say,  
a voice that speaks of peace,  
peace for his people.  
His help is near for those who fear him  
and his glory will dwell in our land. (R.)
- Mercy and faithfulness have met;  
justice and peace have embraced.  
Faithfulness shall spring from the earth  
and justice look down from heaven (R.)
- The Lord will make us prosper  
and our earth shall yield its fruit.  
Justice shall march before him  
and peace shall follow his steps. (R.)

**SECOND READING** 2 Peter 3:8-14

A reading from the second letter of Peter  
There is one thing, my friends, that you must  
never forget: that with the Lord, "a day"  
can mean a thousand years, and a thousand  
years is like a day. The Lord is not being slow  
to carry out his promises, as anybody else  
might be called slow; but he is being patient  
with you all, wanting nobody to be lost and  
everybody to be brought to change his ways.  
The Day of the Lord will come like a thief,  
and then with a roar the sky will vanish, the  
elements will catch fire and fall apart, the  
earth and all that it contains will be burnt up.

Since everything is coming to an end like  
this, you should be living holy and saintly  
lives while you wait and long for the Day of  
God to come, when the sky will dissolve in  
flames and the elements melt in the heat.  
What we are waiting for is what he promised:  
the new heavens and new earth, the place  
where righteousness will be at home. So  
then, my friends, while you are waiting, do  
your best to live lives without spot or stain so  
that he will find you at peace.

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** Mark 1:1-8

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Mark.

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus  
Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the  
book of the prophet Isaiah:

Look, I am going to send my messenger  
before you;  
he will prepare your way.

A voice cries in the wilderness:  
Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight,

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared  
in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism  
of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.  
All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem  
made their way to him, and as they were  
baptised by him in the river Jordan they  
confessed their sins. John wore a garment  
of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and  
wild honey. In the course of his preaching he  
said, "Someone is following me, someone  
who is more powerful than I am, and I am not  
fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his  
sandals. I have baptised you with water, but  
he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

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**

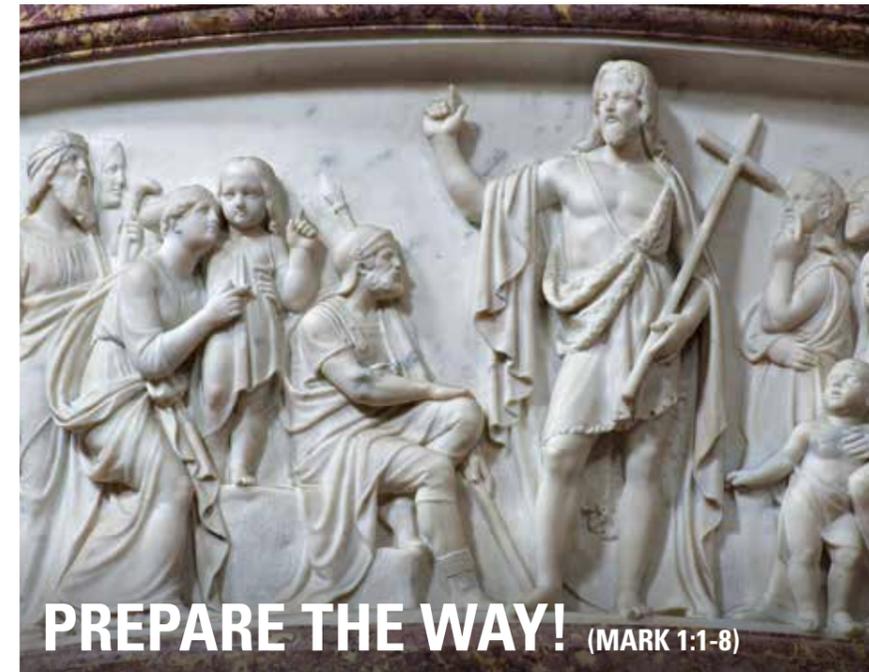
**Jerusalem, arise and stand upon the heights,**  
**and behold the joy which comes to you from**  
**God.**

**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.**

.....  
This is the time of year when we remember  
that God sent his only son "to serve, not to  
be served". He restored love and service to  
the centre of our lives in the person of Jesus  
Christ.

*Queen Elizabeth II*

**THE WORD**

Relief of St John the Baptist in the Church of San Alessandro della Croce in Bergamo, Italy

**PREPARE THE WAY!** (MARK 1:1-8)

Our Advent Gospel passage today presents us with the figure of John the Baptist. Mark casts him in the mould of the prophet Elijah, summoning his listeners to repent and return to the Lord their God.

He is preaching in the wilderness, a place associated in Jewish thought with that period during the Exodus when God and the people of Israel enjoyed a relationship of particularly close intimacy. However, the main emphasis in this extract is on John as the one who heralds the coming of the Messiah and calls on his hearers to prepare themselves for the coming of the one they are waiting for. The evangelist may be exaggerating when he says that *all* Judaea and *all* the people of Jerusalem answered his call, but John is shown elsewhere as enjoying widespread respect.

Mark presents Jesus as the fulfilment of the Jewish scriptures by quoting from the prophets Isaiah and Malachi in John's call to prepare a way for the Lord: John describes Jesus as the one who is more powerful than he is, which indicates that although later he baptises Jesus, he is not greater than Jesus. John's baptism is a symbol of the person's willingness to amend their life. The baptism of the one coming who is greater than John will be with the Holy Spirit: this Spirit represents the power of God at work to bring about holiness in the person, and so represents a deeper renewal than that of the Baptist. This is the beginning of the Good News. ■

**LEARN**

The Gospel according to Mark has no "infancy narrative": the evangelist introduces Jesus as an adult.

Mark presents John the Baptist in terms of the Old Testament prophet Elijah.

The Old Testament reading at Mass is connected with the reading from the Gospel and shows the connection between the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

**REFLECT**

The Gospel of Mark opens with Jesus as an adult; there are no stories about the circumstances of his conception and birth. The evangelist confronts us immediately with the uncomfortable figure of John the Baptist and his call to rethink our way of life and our priorities, especially our relationship with our God. By presenting his understanding of Jesus as a story, Mark is inviting us to become part of the story, to involve ourselves in what is going on as we read or hear the various Gospel episodes. So today we can listen to John the Baptist's preaching not simply as something which happened a long time ago, but as something addressed to each one of us individually today.

The word *metanoia*, usually translated as "repentance", really means "to change one's way of thinking". In many ways, it is easy to adjust our behaviour, to correct faults and adopt positive practices. It takes more effort, and honesty, to examine our attitudes and beliefs and to change those. Advent is the time when we are invited to think, not so much about the baby Jesus, but rather about the coming of God the Lord into our lives and hearts here and now. We might think about our own baptism and what that means to us. If we use the next three weeks to look at what Jesus means to us and draw closer to him in friendship, it will be time well spent. ■

**DO**

Make the Sign of the Cross with holy water and think about your baptism: how could you deepen your relationship with God during Advent?

**SAY**

**Prepare a way for the Lord:  
make his paths straight.  
(Mark 1:3; Isaiah 40:3)**

**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, one God, for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

**FIRST READING** Isaiah 61: 1-2, 10-11

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.  
The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,  
to bind up hearts that are broken;  
to proclaim liberty to captives,  
freedom to those in prison;  
to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.  
"I exult for joy in the Lord,  
my soul rejoices in my God,  
for he has clothed me in garments of salvation,  
he has wrapped me in the cloak of integrity,  
like a bridegroom wearing his wreath,  
like a bride adorned in her jewels.  
For as the earth makes fresh things grow,  
as a garden makes seeds spring up,  
so will the Lord make both integrity and praise  
spring up in the sight of the nations."  
The word of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM** Luke 1

Response:

**My soul rejoices in my God.**

1. My soul glorifies the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.  
He looks on his servant in her nothingness;  
henceforth all ages will call me blessed.  
(R.)
2. The Almighty works marvels for me.  
Holy his name!  
His mercy is from age to age,  
on those who fear him. (R.)
3. He fills the starving with good things,  
sends the rich away empty.  
He protects Israel, his servant,  
remembering his mercy. (R.)

**SECOND READING** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians.  
Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God, because this is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus.  
Never try to suppress the Spirit or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt; think before you do anything – hold on to what is good and avoid every form of evil.

May the God of peace make you perfect and holy; and may you all be kept safe and blameless, spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has called you and he will not fail you.

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** John 1:6-8, 19-28

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

A man came, sent by God.  
His name was John.  
He came as a witness,  
as a witness to speak for the light,  
so that everyone might believe through him.  
He was not the light,  
only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness.  
When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, "I am not the Christ." "Well then," they asked "are you Elijah?" "I am not" he said. "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?" So John said, "I am, as Isaiah prophesied:

a voice that cries in the wilderness:  
Make a straight way for the Lord."

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, "Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?" John replied, "I baptise with water; but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap." This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

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 has 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 pilgrims continue to come. Only God knows what each one of us brings, and with what kind of heart. We come mystically to this cave. We know the mess we bring and the often distracted heart that brings it. But this is all we have – all we are. One stretches out his arms to receive.

*Basil M Pennington OCSO*

**THE WORD**

**REJOICE –  
THE LORD IS  
NEAR!**

(JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28)



*Statue of St John the Baptist on the north side of Charles Bridge, one of the most famous tourist spots in Prague*

**John the Baptist is, in some ways, a transitional figure: he straddles what we usually call the Old and New Testaments, by which we mean the Jewish and Christian scriptures.**

He looks backward to the prophets of the Jewish tradition, especially to Elijah, the figure who represents the prophetic tradition. On the other hand, he looks forward to the coming of the Christ and functions as his herald, announcing the near arrival of the kingdom of God.

In today's Gospel episode, we hear how John was a puzzle to those who shared his Jewish faith: was he, in fact, the Messiah? There seem to have been more than a few people who thought that he might well be. The leaders of the people send representatives to ask John to clarify his position, and he states firmly that he is not the Christ, whose sandal-strap he is not worthy to undo.

The New Testament writers clearly had a difficulty with the figure of John the Baptist and his relationship to Jesus. John was obviously a significant person at the time and so has a place in the Gospel tradition. The reading from the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, the first paragraph of our extract today, presents him as being sent by God – as a witness. No matter how important John was in his own right, his place in the tradition is as a subordinate to Jesus, and once Jesus appears, John's role comes to an end. We might remember that the most important person in the Gospel tradition is Jesus: all other characters, no matter how significant, are always presented in relation to Jesus and never in isolation, separated from him. ■

**LEARN**

In the Fourth Gospel, the term "the Jews" normally refers to the Jewish leaders who are hostile to Jesus.

In the Gospel according to John, "to believe" is to make a positive decision for Jesus and his teaching.

Priests and Levites are figures principally associated with the Temple in Jerusalem.

**REFLECT**

Someone once remarked that there is no occurrence of the word "faith" in the Gospel according to John. This statement is, strictly speaking, true. The noun "faith" is not found, but the verb "to believe" occurs well over 100 times. Faith, in this sense, is not something that we possess but rather something we do. The Creed which we declare together at the Eucharist is a statement of doctrine, but faith is essentially a relationship with God. The evangelist John tells us throughout his Gospel version that to believe is to make a choice: it is not a matter of logic, but rather a personal decision to accept Jesus and his teaching.

As we approach the celebration of the birth of Christ, we might reflect on this aspect of our Christian life. Sometimes cradle Catholics say that they envy people who come to the faith later in life, because they have had to make a conscious, adult decision for themselves in a way that others, born into Catholic families and raised in a Christian environment, never had to. At Christmas, we celebrate the coming of the light into the world. It is our choice whether we live in the light or not. We might make this Christmas an opportunity to renew that resolution once more. ■

**SAY**

**Rejoice in the Lord always!  
(Philippians 4:4)**

**DO**

Look at the state of the roads around your town: how does their condition reflect your readiness to welcome Jesus at Christmas?



**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,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING** 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16

A reading from the second book of Samuel.  
Once David had settled into his house and  
the Lord had given him rest from all the  
enemies surrounding him, the king said to  
the prophet Nathan, "Look, I am living in a  
house of cedar while the ark of God dwells in  
a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go and do  
all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with  
you."

But that very night the word of the Lord  
came to Nathan: "Go and tell my servant  
David, 'Thus the Lord speaks: Are you the  
man to build me a house to dwell in? I took  
you from the pasture, from following the  
sheep, to be leader of my people Israel; I  
have been with you on all your expeditions;  
I have cut off all your enemies before you.  
I will give you fame as great as the fame of  
the greatest on earth. I will provide a place  
for my people Israel; I will plant them there  
and they shall dwell in that place and never  
be disturbed again; nor shall the wicked  
continue to oppress them as they did, in  
the days when I appointed judges over my  
people Israel; I will give them rest from all  
their enemies. The Lord will make you great;  
the Lord will make you a House. And when  
your days are ended and you are laid to  
rest with your ancestors, I will preserve the  
offspring of your body after you and make  
his sovereignty secure. I will be a father to  
him and he a son to me. Your House and your  
sovereignty will always stand secure before  
me and your throne be established for ever.'"

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 88

Response:

I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord.

- I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord;  
through all ages my mouth will proclaim  
your truth.  
Of this I am sure, that your love lasts for  
ever,  
that your truth is firmly established as the  
heavens. (R.)
- "I have made a covenant with my chosen  
one;  
I have sworn to David my servant:  
I will establish your dynasty for ever  
and set up your throne through all ages."  
(R.)

- He will say to me: "You are my father,  
my God, the rock who saves me."  
I will keep my love for him always;  
with him my covenant shall endure. (R.)

**SECOND READING** Romans 16:25-27

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

Glory to him who is able to give you the  
strength to live according to the Good News I  
preach, and in which I proclaim Jesus Christ,  
the revelation of a mystery kept secret for  
endless ages, but now so clear that it must  
be broadcast to pagans everywhere to bring  
them to the obedience of faith. This is only  
what scripture has predicted, and it is all part  
of the way the eternal God wants things to  
be. He alone is wisdom; give glory therefore  
to him through Jesus Christ for ever and  
ever. Amen.

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 1:26-38

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Luke.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a  
town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin  
 betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the  
House of David; and the virgin's name was  
Mary. He went in and said to her, "Rejoice,  
so highly favoured! The Lord is with you." She  
was deeply disturbed by these words and  
asked herself what this greeting could mean,  
but the angel said to her, "Mary, do not be  
afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen!  
You are to conceive and bear a son, and you  
must name him Jesus. He will be great and  
will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord  
God will give him the throne of his ancestor  
David; he will rule over the House of Jacob  
for ever and his reign will have no end." Mary  
said to the angel, "But how can this come  
about, since I am a virgin?" "The Holy Spirit  
will come upon you" the angel answered  
"and the power of the Most High will cover  
you with its shadow. And so the child will be  
holy and will be called Son of God. Know this  
too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old  
age, herself conceived a son, and she whom  
people called barren is now in her sixth  
month, for nothing is impossible to God." "I  
am the handmaid of the Lord," said Mary "let  
what you have said be done to me." And the  
angel left her.

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.

Which Mary? A woman "blessed because she  
believed" always and everywhere in God's  
words, or a "plaster statue" from whom we  
beg favours at little cost? The Virgin Mary  
of the Gospel, venerated by the Church at  
prayer, or a Mary of our own making, one  
who restrains the arm of a vengeful God, one  
sweeter than Jesus the ruthless judge, one  
more merciful than the Lamb slain for us?

Pope Francis

**THE WORD**

# MARY AND THE WORD OF GOD

(LUKE 1:26-38)



Mary is the central figure in Luke's account of the birth of Jesus. Our Gospel reading today presents us with the scene of the annunciation of the birth of Jesus by the angel Gabriel, God's messenger.

However, this is not a simple announcement: Mary is not the passive instrument by whom God's purpose is achieved; rather, this depends on Mary's willingness to accept her place in God's plan. Throughout Luke's Gospel account, the evangelist emphasises the importance of God's word. It is this word that Mary accepts and to which she commits herself. In this way, she is the model of the disciple, one who listens to God's word, meditates upon it and puts it into practice. We hear this theme restated in different ways often in Luke's narrative.

The annunciation of a birth is a frequent event in the Bible and the last example before this one is that given to Zechariah in the Temple, about the birth of John the Baptist. Such an account indicates the importance of the child to be born and his place in the Lord's plan for Israel. But there is a crucial difference between the annunciation to Mary and all the rest. In every other case, the woman has been unable to bear a child, which to everyone else would be an indication of punishment from God, hence the shame attached to her condition. God intervenes to remove the cause of her barrenness and the child is conceived in the normal way. There is no indication that Mary suffers from any condition which would prevent her having a child – quite the reverse – but Luke's concern is to show that Jesus has no human father and is the Son of God. The virginal conception of Jesus is a far greater miracle than the birth of the heroes of Israel – and of John the Baptist. ■

**REFLECT**

Advent is the season when we think of Mary's place in the story of God's dealings with the human race and of her importance in the life of the Church, the people of God. She is held up as a model for the disciples of Jesus. But even for Luke, her importance lies not so much in her being the physical mother of Jesus, but in her attitude to the word of God, listening, meditating and putting it into practice. It is in this that Mary can be our model.

We may feel that we cannot do much to advance the kingdom of God, but as long as we try to live up to our Christian calling, then we are doing all that the Lord expects of us. Bringing up a family, living our life in the light of our faith, is what being a disciple of Jesus is all about. One thing we might keep in mind is that Mary and Joseph were real human beings, and it is clear that committing themselves to God's plan was not easy. In that, they can be truly examples that we can follow. ■

**DO**

Put out the figure of Mary from your crib set: use it during the week to help you reflect on Mary and her positive response to God's word.

**LEARN**

The mystery of the incarnation is better described as "the virginal conception of Jesus", rather than "the virgin birth".

Annunciation narratives in the Bible are stereotyped stories, designed to highlight the importance of the child to be born.

The annunciation to Mary is the only story of this type to include a virginal conception.

**SAY**

Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with you.

**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 Sion; 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

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

**PSALM**

Psalm 97

Response:

All the ends of the earth have seen the  
salvation 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.

## THE WORD

THE GREATEST  
GIFT OF ALL

(JOHN 1:1-18)

The stories on which we have been reflecting over the past few weeks from the accounts of Matthew and Luke focus on the conception and birth of the Son of God.

The writer of the Fourth Gospel, whom we usually call "John", begins his presentation of Jesus and his message with a profound reflection on the mystery of the Word which existed with God from the very beginning and took flesh as a human being in the person of Jesus. The evangelist expressed this as "pitching his tent among us". But why? Jesus is God's Word, God's invitation to human beings to accept their true nature as children of God. This is an offer, not a demand. Throughout Israel's history, God reached out to the people, offering a covenant, a relationship of sharing life and love, not for any merit on their part, but simply out of God's free choice. When the people fell short in their living out of the covenant, God always offered the chance of being forgiven and renewing the bond.

In the person of Jesus, we see God's ultimate offer of such a relationship: not one of duty or obligation, but a free response on our part to what God has done for us in reaching out in this way. God is presenting us with a gift: it is up to us to accept or refuse it on an ongoing basis, not just once and for all. ■

## REFLECT

Christmas is very much a time for giving presents. Most homes have a tree under which the brightly wrapped gifts are laid awaiting the excitement of being opened on Christmas Day. Gifts are important, not necessarily because of what they are but because of what they mean. If we suspect that someone is giving us a present out of a sense of obligation, then the object itself will not be of much interest to us. But if we realise that something, maybe apparently of little objective value, is an expression of love and affection, then it is something we are likely to treasure for a long time.

Today, we celebrate God's greatest gift to us, that of God's love in the person of Jesus. This is not a gift that we are supposed to put away safely in a cupboard and bring out every Christmas and Easter, but one which should be part of our daily life, a gift that we refer to as our faith. The old Catechism described faith as "a response to revelation": at the feast of the Nativity (the birth) of the Lord, we are again presented with God's clearest statement of the Word, and we are invited to respond once more as grateful disciples of Jesus.

## LEARN

There is no infancy narrative, no story of the conception and birth of Jesus, in the Gospel according to John.

Jesus as the Word of God corresponds to the female figure of Wisdom in the Jewish Hebrew and Greek scriptures.

The feast of Christmas replaced the pagan Roman festival of Saturnalia: that is why it is celebrated in December.

## SAY

Thank you, God, for the  
gift of your Word to me.

## DO

As you unwrap your present, think of the person who gave it to you and their reason for doing so. Then remember Jesus in the crib as God's present to you and God's reason for sending you this gift.



**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,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING** Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3

A reading from the book of Genesis.

The word of the Lord was spoken to Abram in a vision, "Have no fear, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great."

"My Lord," Abram replied "what do you intend to give me? I go childless..." Then Abram said, "See, you have given me no descendants; some man of my household will be my heir." And then this word of the Lord was spoken to him, "He shall not be your heir; your heir shall be one of your own flesh and blood." Then taking him outside he said, "Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can. Such will be your descendants" he told him. Abram put his faith in the Lord, who counted this as making him justified.

The Lord dealt kindly with Sarah as he had said, and did what he had promised her. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the time God had promised. Abraham named the son born to him Isaac, the son to whom Sarah had given birth.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 104

Response:

**He, the Lord, is our God.**

**He remembers his covenant for ever.**

1. Give thanks to the Lord, tell his name,  
make known his deeds among the  
peoples.

O sing to him, sing his praise;  
tell all his wonderful works! (R.)

2. Be proud of his holy name,  
let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice.  
Consider the Lord and his strength;  
constantly seek his face. (R.)

3. Remember the wonders he has done,  
his miracles, the judgements he spoke.  
O children of Abraham, his servant,  
O sons of the Jacob he chose. (R.)

4. He remembers his covenant for ever,  
his promise for a thousand generations,  
the covenant he made with Abraham,  
the oath he swore to Isaac. (R.)

**SECOND READING** Hebrews 11:8,11-12,17-19

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise would be faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who was already as good as dead himself, more descendants than could be counted, as many as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though the promises had been made to him and he had been told: It is through Isaac that your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!

At various times in the past

and in various different ways,

God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets;

but in our own time, the last days,

he has spoken to us through his Son.

Alleluia!

**GOSPEL**

Luke 2:22-40

(For shorter form, read between ><)

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke.

>When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord< – observing what stands written in the law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord – and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

"Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace,

just as you promised;  
because my eyes have seen the salvation  
which you have prepared for all the nations  
to see,

a light to enlighten the pagans  
and the glory of your people Israel."

As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected – and

a sword will pierce your own soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare."

There was a prophetess also, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

>When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

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**

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.

27 DECEMBER 2020

# Sunday Message

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

**THE WORD**

Year B • Psalter Week 1

## A VISIT TO THE TEMPLE

(LUKE 2:22-40)



The atmosphere of Luke's two chapters about the circumstances of Jesus' birth is very much that of the world of the Hebrew scriptures.

The evangelist emphasises that the Messiah grew up in a family and social setting steeped in the traditions of Israel. His "parents" and the elderly couple in today's Gospel episode represent all that is best in the people, those who are open to the Spirit and to the word of God. Luke mentions five times "the Law of the Lord" which underlines their fidelity to the practice of their religion. The scene takes place at the very heart of Israel's religious focus, the Temple in Jerusalem.

Simeon is a prophet who indicates in his song that the mission of Jesus will provoke different reactions: those who encounter Jesus will have to decide whether to accept him and his message or not. Mary represents the people of Israel, and the sword which will pierce her soul represents the act of judgement or discernment which will accompany this encounter: it is the blade which will penetrate the deepest part of the person to see what she or he is made of, to discover the decision they have come to about Jesus and his message. It is out of those who welcome Jesus, like Simeon and Anna, that the new people of God will be composed.

Luke notes that the family returns to Nazareth and that the child grew up like any other, so the Son of God was a true human being. ■

**REFLECT**

Luke's infancy narrative has been called "the Gospel in miniature": all the main themes which will appear in the story of Jesus and his ministry are stated here and developed later. One motif which emerges from today's readings is the division which Jesus will cause among his hearers. Not everyone by any means will react in a positive way and their hostility will lead to his death on the cross. Each person will have to decide whether to accept Jesus or not. Those who welcome him will form the new people of God.

No one in the Gospel story is a disciple in isolation: even Peter is one of the circle of disciples. Although each disciple has a personal relationship with Jesus the Master, we are all members of a wider group, which we call the Church. Luke emphasises that the righteous characters in the story of Jesus are faithful members of Israel, deeply attached and devoted to the traditions of their people. The purpose of such practices is to bring them close to God and to deepen their commitment. We might remember that the definition of the Church today is "the people of God". The purpose of our celebrating the Eucharist together is not just to celebrate our faith (or simply to fulfil an obligation) but also to give support to our fellow parishioners. If someone is struggling, it can be an immense help and encouragement to see others turning up every week. ■

**SAY**

Mine eyes have seen  
the glory of the  
coming of the Lord.  
(Traditional song)

**LEARN**

The name Jesus (and its Hebrew form *Joshua*) means "the Lord saves".

Luke often pairs a male and female character in his writing, for example Simeon and Anna.

The sword which will pierce Mary's soul is the sword of judgement, not of sorrow.

**DO**

Look around at the other people at the Eucharist: consider how your presence can be a support to someone who is struggling – and they to you.

