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Christmas Day - 25 December 2021

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25 December 2021

The Nativity of the Lord Christmas Mass in the day

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

Introduction

The Mass during the day draws us to reflect on the mystery of God whose divine majesty far surpasses our understanding yet dwells among us; this is Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human. The creative force of God entwined within creation itself. The 'true light' that darkness cannot overcome, pushing into the shadows of our existence.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus you came so that we could have life.
Lord, have mercy.

You gave us your wWord that brings light into the darkness.
Christ, have mercy.

You came so we could become children of the light.
Lord, have mercy.

First Reading

Isaiah 52:7–10

Sentries looking out from the walls of a battered city see their hero return to relieve and restore the desolate people. This hero is not like any other, it is God's very being. The Redeemer and Comforter is among us, all the world is welcomed to witness the salvation of God.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 97(98):1–6

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

It is astounding that a psalm written possibly 1000 years before Jesus was born is so apt for the feast of Christmas.

Second Reading

Hebrews 1:1–6

The Letter to the Hebrews opens by expressing how Christ is the climax of divine revelation. God's powerful Word brought creation into being and has spoken to the prophets of the Hebrew tradition. This same force is now present as a 'perfect copy' of God's glory and nature in the person of Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reading

John 1:1–18 or John 1:1–5, 9–14

God spoke into the darkness, light burst forth and creation began to unfold. This imagery found in Genesis inspires John's opening to the Gospel. The Word that was 'in the beginning', the light that casts out darkness, is now entwined fully in the human story.

Reflection

We human beings long for many things. Christmas time can thrust in front of us the tendency we have to excite our longings in rather material ways. The question asked, "what do you want for Christmas" is one of many common phrases heard leading up to this day. Of course, there is nothing wrong with this. Gift giving and receiving is a delightful custom of the season and symbolically appropriate. Nevertheless, it does bring to our attention the question of what we really want, what we really need and, perhaps, most importantly, how we might find it. The readings of today's liturgy do speak to this.

Starting with the reading from Isaiah, it speaks of a bursting forth of joy that comes from sentinels, guards on a figurative city wall, who see the "return of the Lord to Zion" (52:8). What is this great joy based on? What is Zion exactly and where has God gone that a return is needed? These are just some of the questions that can come at a quick reading of the text.

To briefly unpack this, the setting of this text is a people who have been subjugated by the Babylonians and whose population has been taken into exile away from Jerusalem. Jerusalem, here at least, refers both to the place and to the people of God – thus, the 'ruins of Jerusalem' are the people themselves as well as their homeland. Other words used to describe the people used in this section of Isaiah includes plundered, looted, trapped in holes, and forgotten prisoners (42:22). Moreover, these sorts of terms are a culmination of understanding that God is no longer present, the Lord has been absent to their senses.

The word Zion refers to a hill that, once conquered by King David, was renamed to the more familiar Jerusalem and, with the surrounds, became the capital of a united Israel. With that background in view, in Isaiah, it represents the idealised expression of God's presence with the Lord's people. It is where the people are free to be their

most blessed and happy versions of themselves. Under the protection and guidance of the Lord, experiencing peace (shalom) and, as such, being something of a beacon of God's goodness to the world.

When Isaiah expresses that the 'Lord returns to Zion', it is speaking of a restoration of a people to themselves. Jerusalem, the geographic location, never went away. It was there, but, without God's presence, it was dead. Similarly, the people of God remained, even if as a remnant, but they are empty, forgotten, trapped; as good as dead. God's return to Zion is a return to life. God's return to Zion is the people moving from mere existence to vitality.

Turning to the Gospel, the message there and for this Christmas day is, similarly, that God is indeed with us. In John's Gospel it is the imagery of light that catches our attention. Like the words of Isaiah, it speaks of a God who is speaking into a place that exists, where there is life of sorts, but it is missing vitality – it is dark. God not only speaks into this darkness, but pushes into it and, so, pushes the darkness away. That is what light does, it 'expels' darkness.

At Christmas we are celebrating God's presence in the world; "The Word become flesh" (1:14) to quote the Gospel. The Word came into a world that is dark, but not empty. It was a world that was full of activity, full of human structures and accomplishments. Though there is reference to the creative force of God, the Word that was 'in the beginning' (v. 1) and through which the 'world came into being' (v. 10), the Incarnation is made present into a creation that was very much under way, as it is for us now. God's light does not come to bring something altogether new (the second reading attests to this), but to enlighten something already there. Moreover, the light that comes into the world suggests that there is darkness that needs expelling. What is this exactly?

A complete response is clearly not possible here, but we can note two general understandings of darkness that John is referring to. Firstly, it is to the more obvious sense of darkness that we experience in the form of human despair caused by any number of circumstances, human created or otherwise. Natural disaster, social injustices, sickness, wicked and selfish ambition causing poverty and oppression – there is a long list of such things which are still with us as they were when John's Gospel was penned.

But there is another dimension here too. That being when we confuse mere existence with life. Further, we confuse human ability with absolute worth, inherently limited human vision with complete knowing.

In this sense, the contrast of light and darkness is a quite deliberate imagery. Darkness has no power on its own. Its power is that it confuses us. In darkness, we are bound to our inability to clearly see and decide well. We can move, but with unknown purpose. We can look active, but to vague and obscured effect. I suspect John is speaking to a world that, in many circumstances, is full of activity, but futile in efforts to find meaning and true worth. To return to our opening reflection, a world full of the question 'what do you want' and 'what do you need' but that struggles to answer that in a complete manner.

Evidently, it is difficult to answer that sort of questioning. However, at Christmas we are again reminded that there is one that does know the answer. As will be stated later in John, Jesus is “the way the truth and the life” (14:6), and this grace is offered to all. We can never know fully, and we can never fully grasp ‘the light’ either, we can only believe and allow God to enlighten our way so, through the journey of faith, we come to find our true end, our true purpose; that is, what truly matters.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

Today we gather in a special festive atmosphere of love, so let us turn to our loving God with our needs and the needs of our community.

Petitions

We pray for the Church leaders throughout the world, especially Pope Francis. May their leadership inspire in others to seek the love that God that expressed through the birth of Jesus.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the members of the Plenary Council in Australia. May they continue their work towards the final assembly in July this next year and be of value to the Synod of Bishops in 2023.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for leaders of nations throughout the world. May they be honest as they work for the good of the people they serve and acknowledge that Christians have a need and a right to celebrate today. As we celebrate the saving power of God may they be equitable in meeting the needs of everyone during this global pandemic.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who are homeless and in need on this day, that generous people will assist them in love and charity.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those serving in the hospitality industry that the joy of the day will not be overshadowed by the poor behaviour and the overindulgence of their customers. May the peace of Christ be evident in their celebrations.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

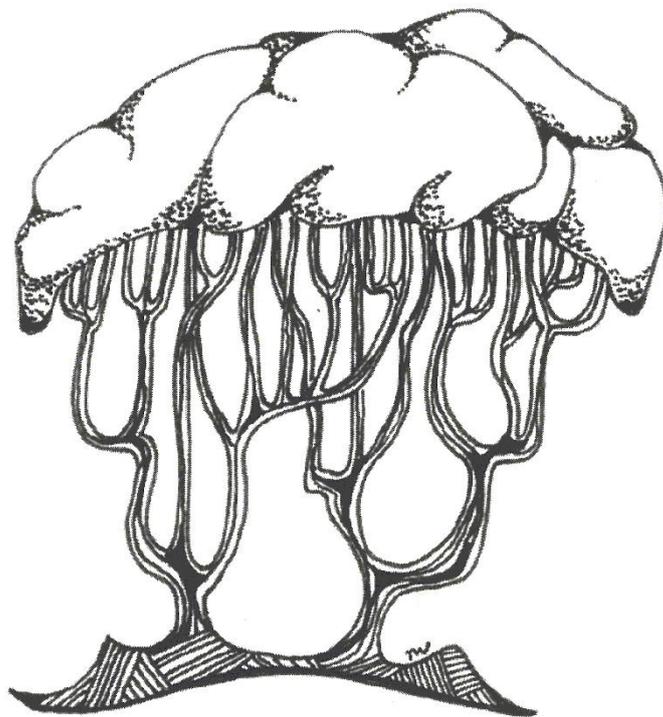
We pray for artists, that their creativity be a vehicle to express the joy of the Incarnation in ways that extend our understanding.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Father, we know that, in your generosity, you will answer our needs as we pray through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus, the Lord.

Amen.



**Let all the forests
cry out for joy.**

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

Angels we have heard on high. French Carol. 622
Away in a manger. J. McFarland/ W. Kirkpatrick. 289
Hark! the herald angels sing. C. Wesley/ F. Mendelssohn. 294
Joy to the world. I. Watts/ G. F. Handel. 295
O come, all ye faithful. J. Wade. 287 (Verses 1-3)
O little town of Bethlehem. P. Brooks/ L. Redner. 296
Once in royal David's city. H. Gauntlett/ C. F. Alexander. 297
The first Nowell. English text and melody. 298 (Verses 1, 2, 4 & 6)

AOV1

Hark! the herald angels sing. C. Wesley/ F. Mendelssohn. 171
Joy to the world. I. Watts/ G. F. Handel. 170
O come, all ye faithful. J. Wade. 167
The first Nowell. English text and melody. 169 (Verses 1, 2 & 5)
What child is this? W. C. Dix/ English melody. 165 (Verses 1-2)

AOV2

Angels we have heard on high. French Carol. 140
Sing we, sing we Noel. K. Poelker. 124

AOV4Kids

And did you see Him little star? C. Gibson/ H. Clyde. 60
Out on the road to Bethlehem. M. Nicol. 61
Baby lying in a manger. P. Combe. 63
Can this really be true? L. Newton/ T. Wittwer. 64

AOVNG

All the ends of the Earth. Bobby Fisher. 5
Emmanuel. Raymond Badham. 40
Let the season shine. Judy Bailey. 87

CWB

A child is born in Bethlehem. Tr. Ralph Wright OSB. 612
Of the Father's love begotten. Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, tr. John Mason Neale
etc. 779
Unto us a boy is born. Tr. Percy Dearmer. 849

CWBII

Of the Father's love begotten. Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, tr. John Mason Neale *et al.* 268
Unto us a child is born! Tr. Percy Dearmer. 273

S&S1

All the ends of the Earth. Bobby Fisher. 75

S&S2

All the ends of the Earth. Ken Canedo. 270

All the ends of the Earth. Bob Hurd. 271

Born this day. Ken Canedo. 296

Sing to the Lord a new song. Angus McDonell. 272

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 97: *All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.*

Psalm 97: Joseph Roff/Joseph Gelineau SJ. CWB 185

Psalm 97(98): Christopher Willcock SJ. CWB 598

Psalm 98 (97): Jenny O'Brien. JOBC pg. 18

All the ends of the Earth: Paul Mason. PM p. pg. 72

All the ends of the earth. LPSF David Haas and Marty Haugen. pg.14

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Glory to God (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Recessional]

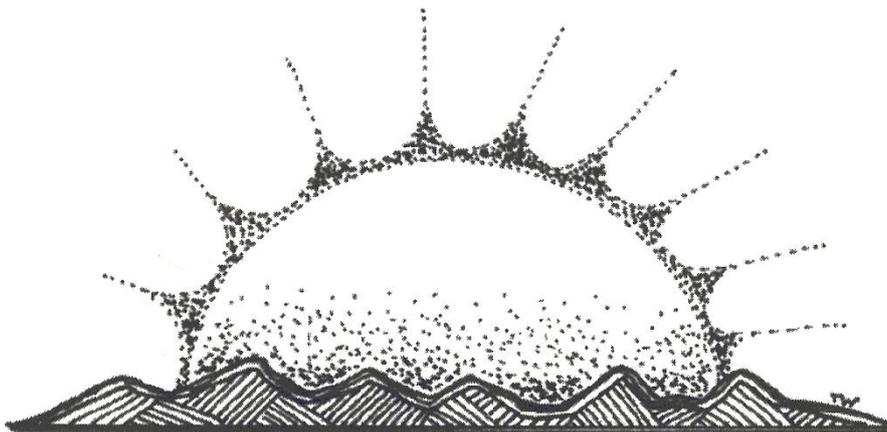
Glory, gloria (STAR) [CHILDREN, Gathering, Recessional]

Sing new songs of joy (FWS/CWB II) *based on Ps 97 (98)*

All the ends of the earth (LCC) *Ps 97/98 (Chn's Lectionary)* [Psalm, Gifts]

There is a child (TT/SYJ) *based on Is 9:1-7*

This little boy (TT/SYJ) [Non-Scriptural Reflection - Gifts]



**A holy day has
dawned upon us.**