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24 December 2022

Nativity of the Lord, Christmas Vigil

Reflection by Anthony Doran

Pastoral Note

Often a Christmas Vigil Mass will have a focus on children and families. Many parishes would use the readings from Mass During the Night, perhaps with the Gospel from Luke adapted for proclamation to children.

The texts for the vigil mass need not be used at an evening Mass on 24 December – the texts for Mass During the Night may be used.

Introduction

In this Vigil Mass of Christmas, we wait with even more joyful and intense hope for the coming of the Saviour, as if we have one foot still in the season of Advent and one foot already in the Christmas season. In this Mass, we see the beginning of the development of the theme of the four Christmas Masses: of night giving way to day, of the light breaking through the darkness.

Penitential Act

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

Lord Jesus, you come in flesh from the Father. Lord have mercy.

You were born of the Virgin Mary. Christ have mercy.

You take us to the Father. Lord have mercy.

First Reading

Isaiah 62:1-5

This reading comes from a section of the Isaiah's prophecy about the glorious future of Israel, and in this reading we hear what Jerusalem will be like when her messiah comes. When the long-awaited messiah comes, the joy will be as when there is a wedding: God will rejoice.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 88:4-5. 16-17. 27. 29. R. cf. v. 2

Response: For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

This psalm is one of the royal psalms – praising God who promised to make a covenant with the royal house of David, the God who is faithful to that covenant. Just as God's faithfulness endures, so too, does this covenant.

Second Reading

Acts of the Apostles 13:16-17. 22-25

Paul's preaching in Antioch traces the history of our salvation, from slavery in Egypt, through David the king, to David's descendant, Jesus our saviour whose coming is heralded by John the Baptist.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 1:1-25 (Shorter Form 1:18-25)

The long version of this Gospel Reading opens with Matthew's account of the genealogy of Jesus, reminding us that Jesus was born into a human family in the midst of human history. The second part of this reading (the shorter form) tells of the birth of Jesus who is not like any other? figure from human history, but God-with-us.

Reflection

It is perhaps a pity that Christmas Vigil Masses in Australia do not use the prayers and readings which the Church provides. The texts of this Mass truly have the character of a vigil...there is waiting...there is a sense of expectation and deep longing in the texts which the Church presents to us. Even if a parish community does not use these texts but those of the Mass During the Night, they still provide a rich source of prayer and reflection for those of us waiting in joyful hope.

The First Reading (Isaiah 62:1-5) comes from that section of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah which deals with the return of the Exiles from Babylon. The return had stunned them into silence. Jerusalem was destroyed, they faced hostility from those who had moved in to take their place. The exiles had returned to a situation of discouragement and disappointment. But, prophesies Isaiah, 'I will not be silent...about Jerusalem, I will not grow weary.'

For even though these exiles had returned to disaster, when the Messiah comes, Isaiah assures them, the holy city will shine like the dawn, aflame with salvation. And then, perhaps strangely to our ears, Isaiah talks of the coming of the Messiah using the imagery of a wedding....'you shall be called 'My Delight' and your land 'The Wedded'. But it should not sound strange to us. As we have journeyed through Advent and listened again and again to what Isaiah has promised us, we know that the land itself, indeed the whole of creation will sing with joy when the Lord comes.

And when the Lord comes, there is a very real sense of the marriage of God with humanity...for God takes on our human flesh, so that we might take on God's divinity.

In the birth of the Messiah, our 'exile' comes to an end, for no longer are we strangers in a strange land. Because our Messiah comes, not with chariots and horses, but in our own flesh. So, we can no longer ever be strangers in a strange land, far distant from God. In the mystery of the Incarnation, God is forever wedded to our humanity so that we might be forever wedded to God's divinity. For the Incarnation does not end somehow, somewhere along the line. When God takes on our human flesh, not only is humanity forever changed, but the way we experience God must be forever changed, too. It is for this good news that we keep watch in vigil.

This, too, is the reason why, at this Vigil Mass, we read Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. To trace the history of our salvation, Matthew lists the three lots of fourteen generations of Jesus. When this Gospel Reading is proclaimed, it is sometimes hard to see how it is good news. After all, it's just a list of names, isn't it? Well, yes, but it is much more than that. While Matthew's account of the genealogy of Jesus does indeed remind us that Jesus was born into a human family in the midst of human history, this is not the full story. While his human lineage might be impressive, by naming him "the Christ...son of David and Son of Abraham", Matthew is reminding his readers that Jesus is also the Messiah, quoting again of the words of Isaiah: "the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'."

It is worth noting, too, that three of the four women mentioned in the genealogy were foreigners, who all give birth under irregular conditions. What is God saying to us in these women? I think the answer is clear and simple. In this child Jesus, born at the end of this long family tree, salvation is no longer just the preserve of Israel. The horizons of God's grace have been expanded – blown apart really – in this child whose advent we await. Just as in Luke's Gospel the first to hear the good news of the birth of Jesus will be those on the fringes of society like shepherds, so too, in this genealogy, it is these women 'on the outside' who are brought into God's household through the part they play in the ancestry of Jesus. And of course, these three women who give birth in unusual circumstances prefigure Mary, the mother of this child Jesus, who too, gave birth in unusual circumstances. God uses the unusual, those on the fringes, those considered strangers and outsiders to unfold his plan. Reminding us always that his embrace of salvation is never exclusive and limited, but boundless and without end.

This Vigil Mass does prepare us, indeed, pushes us headlong into our celebration of the Christmas mystery. And as we celebrate this Mass (or even as we pray and meditate on the Vigil texts which the Church places before us), we know 'the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see the salvation of our God' (cf. Isaiah 40:5, Communion Antiphon).

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

As we celebrate the coming of Jesus who leads us towards the Kingdom, let us offer the needs of our world and our community to our merciful Father.

Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church as they prepare for the Synod of 2023. Sustain them us so that the Church may continue to be the visible presence of faith, hope and charity in the world.

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

We pray for world leaders, that guided by the Holy Spirit they will meet the needs of the wider community and always allow freedom of worship and bring peace, not war.

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

We pray for those who are ill or injured, may they find hope and renewal in the triumphant message of Christmas through the love and care of others.

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

We pray for this assembly, that we may trust in the Holy Spirit and bear witness to your glory through our celebrations of the Lord's coming as a baby in Bethlehem.

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

We pray for those without shelter or security, may they find generosity and kindness in the hearts of their neighbours.

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

We pray for all those who cannot be with us to celebrate Christmas: our family members who have died, those who are travelling, those who are suffering illness. May our prayers for peace blend with theirs.

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

Conclusion

Father, you sent your Son to bring Salvation to all humankind. We acknowledge your love and offer these prayers to you with trust and confidence through the power of the Spirit and in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV 2	AOVK	AOVNG	GA	CW B	CWBI	S&S 2
A child is born in Bethlehem						612		
Angels we have heard on high		140			286	622	255	
Away in a manger					289		256	
Baby lying in a manger			63				257	
Born this day								296
Emmanuel				40				
Good Christians all, rejoice						697	261	
Hark! The herald angels sing	171				294	704	262	
Joy to the world	170				295	728	265	
Let the season shine				87				
O come, all ye faithful (Verses 1-2)	167				287	760	267	
O little town of Bethlehem					296	772	266	
Of the Father's love begotten						779	268	
Once in royal David's city					297	782	269	
Sing we, sing we Nowell		124					271	
The first Nowell	169				298	822	280	
Unto us a boy is born						849	273	
What child is this? (Verses 1-2)	165						275	

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 88: *For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.*

	CWB	GA	JOBA	LPSF
Psalm 88	385	50	pg. 16	pg. 6

Music selections by Michael Mangan

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

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

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

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