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Christmas Vigil - 24 December 2024

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24 December 2024

The Nativity of the Lord Christmas Vigil

Reflection by Andrew Doohan

Introduction

We begin our celebration of the Christmas season not by hearing the traditional account of the Christmas story but rather by hearing how this event, the Incarnation of Jesus, represents the fulfilment of God's promise to God's people. The readings situate the historical event of Jesus' birth in the broader context of salvation history.

Penitential Act

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

Lord Jesus, by your birth you brought hope to the world. Lord, have mercy.

You came so that all people may be saved. Christ, have mercy.

You are the Prince of Peace. Lord, have mercy.

First Reading

Isaiah 62:1–5

The prophet Isaiah expresses a passionate declaration of hope and restoration for Jerusalem, highlighting the deep love God has for God's people.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 88(89):4–5, 16–17, 27, 29

For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

This psalm represents a plea that God will remain faithful to the covenant God had established with God's people through King David.

Second Reading

Acts 13:16–17, 22–25

In one of his first missionary actions, Paul stands up in the synagogue and eloquently proclaims that Jesus is the Saviour promised by God, in fulfilment of all that God had promised.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 1:1–25 or Matthew 1:18–25

In its longer form, the Gospel reading contains both the genealogy of Jesus that begins Matthew's Gospel and Matthew's relatively short account of the conception and birth of Jesus. The shorter form contains only the latter.

Reflection

Every year, the *Ordo* reminds those preparing the liturgy for the Christmas Vigil Mass that for pastoral reasons, the texts of the Vigil can be supplanted by the texts set down for the Midnight Mass. Given many families with younger children tend to attend the Vigil Mass, including the more popular 'Christmas Story', with its mention of angels and shepherds, manger and swaddling clothes, is easily understood.

Yet there is something wonderfully powerful about hearing the proclamation of the 'genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham' that begins the longer form of the Gospel text for the Christmas Vigil Mass—and indeed the whole of the Gospel of Matthew!

Granted, the genealogy is difficult to proclaim well, with complicated names to get one's tongue around and a particular cadence to both recognise and honour, but the larger recounting of the history of faith from Abraham down to Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom 'was born Jesus who is called Christ', contextualises the Incarnation in God's great promise of salvation for God's people.

The birth of Jesus that we celebrate this night is not some random event, not some mere accident. This is the deliberate and intentional act of God fulfilling the promise made to God's people. The Incarnation, God taking on human flesh in the person of Jesus, as a newborn child in a house in Bethlehem, begins the fulfilment of the promise that God had communicated through the prophets from of old.

This is the promise we hear communicated by the prophet Isaiah in our First Reading and to which the Psalmist raises their voice. Indeed, this is the promise to which Paul bears witness in our Second Reading as he addresses the gathered people in Antioch, telling them that Jesus, a descendant of David, has been chosen by God as the Saviour of God's people.

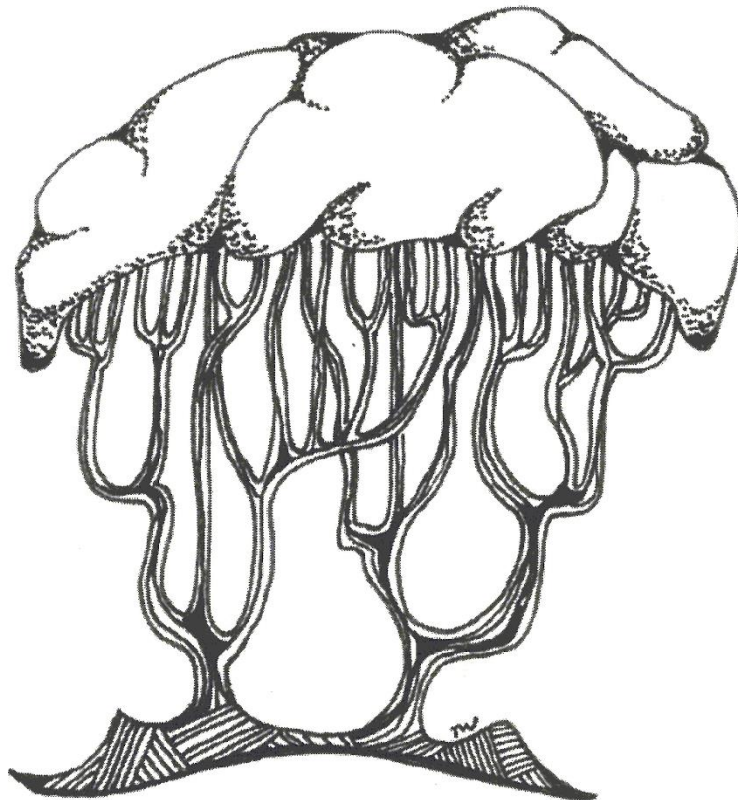
Even the second part of the Gospel reading, the shorter version, highlights how what we celebrate today is all part of God fulfilling God's promise. This alternative version of the Annunciation, interestingly directed more to Joseph than Mary, contains a reference to the prophet Isaiah, wherein we encounter the name 'Emmanuel', a name which we hear means 'God-with-us'.

And the fulfilment of that promise from God, a promise made from of old, has now come to fruition, not just once, long ago in Bethlehem, but always as Jesus himself promised. God now dwells with us, as one like us 'in all things but sin', in order that we might live as faithful disciples of the One who is 'God-with-us'.

This reality is at the very heart of what we celebrate on this great Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord. This feast is not just about shepherds and angels, mangers and stables; in fact, it is hardly about that at all.

This night, we sing of God's goodness, not in the giving of the Law or the sending of prophets, but in deigning to take human flesh and dwell among us. God has given God's very Self to us, God's people, so that we might have the opportunity to be saved.

And that is a very good reason, the very best of reasons perhaps, to raise our voices along with the Psalmist and sing 'For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord'.



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

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

As we gather here tonight, full of joy to celebrate God's extraordinary goodness to us, let us offer our needs through these petitions.

Petitions

We pray for Pope Francis and all the leaders of our Church, that the promises of God throughout time will be revealed through their witness and leadership.

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

We pray for the leaders of our economic, political and corporate entities that they may come to realise the need to welcome the Prince of Peace.

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

We pray for those who work in the hospitality industry that they may find time to be peaceful in this busy period and to be gracious and welcoming to all those whom they serve.

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

We pray for all those who are in hospital, care or prison during this Christmas feast. May they feel treasured and nurtured in a blest way by those who care for them and visit them.

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

We pray for families in our community as they celebrate the Incarnation together. May God's gifts be constantly brought to mind to lessen a possible consumerist focus.

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

We pray for those who have died that they may be welcomed into eternity. We also pray for those who mourn particularly during the Christmas season.

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

Conclusion

God of love, we offer these petitions in hope and joy through the name of your Son Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) Vigil (24 December 2024)

| Title | AOV1 | AOV2 | AOVK | CWB | CWBII | GA |
|---|------|------|------|-----|-------|-----|
| A child is born in Bethlehem | | | | 612 | | |
| Angels we have heard on high | | 140 | | 622 | 255 | 286 |
| Away in a manger | | | | | 256 | 289 |
| Baby lying in a manger | | | 63 | | 257 | |
| Good Christians all, rejoice | | | | 697 | 261 | |
| Hark! The herald angels sing | 171 | | | 704 | 262 | 294 |
| Joy to the world | 170 | | | 728 | 265 | 295 |
| O come, all ye faithful (Verses 1-2) | 167 | | | 760 | 267 | 287 |
| O little town of Bethlehem | | | | 772 | 266 | 296 |
| Of the Father's love begotten | | | | 779 | 268 | |
| Once in royal David's city | | | | 782 | 269 | 297 |
| Sing we, sing we Nowell | | 124 | | | 271 | |
| The first Nowell | 169 | | | 822 | 280 | 298 |
| Unto us a boy is born | | | | 849 | 273 | |
| What child is this? (Verses 1-2) | 165 | | | | 275 | |

| Title | AOVNG | S&S2 |
|----------------------|-------|------|
| Born this day | | 296 |
| Emmanuel | 40 | |
| Let the season shine | 87 | |

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

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

| | CWB | GA | JOBB | LPSF |
|----------|-----|----|--------|-------|
| Psalm 88 | 385 | 50 | pg. 14 | 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 - Gifts]