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## Christmas Day - 25 December 2024

Errol Lobo

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## 25 December 2024

### The Nativity of the Lord Christmas Mass in the day

Reflection by Errol Lobo

#### Introduction

It would seem that, at least as far as the scriptures are concerned, the Church has saved the best for last. The readings, which are the most theologically dense of all the Christmas Masses, draw us into the mystery of the Incarnation; the Son of God taking on our humanity at great cost, revealing to us both the love of God and the dignity of creation. Now in the full splendour of daylight, we bask in the true Light who has come into the world and brought us the salvation of God.

#### 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 word 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

To a people dejected and wounded come the joyful tidings of salvation. God is active in the world, redeeming the people of God in the sight of all nations.

#### Responsorial Psalm

##### Psalm 97(98).1–6

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

God's people respond with shouts of joy for the justice, truth, and love that God has shown them in restoring the house of Israel.

## Second Reading

### Hebrews 1.1–6

In the Son, the radiant light of God's glory and God's perfect likeness, we see and hear all that God wishes to communicate to us. In these 'last days', he reveals the deepest truth about God and the destiny of humanity.

## Gospel Reading

### John 1.1–18 or John 1.1–5, 9–14

In the Christ-child whose birth we celebrate this day, God's very Word has pitched a tent among us, the true light has entered the world, and the One who is nearest the Father's heart has revealed God's sacred face.

## Reflection

'How terrible is the darkness!' muses Salomé in Oscar Wilde's tragedy, as she peers into the pit imprisoning John of the Baptist; fascinated, but also afraid. How terrible indeed must have been the darkness, both outer and inner, enveloping John, whom the Fourth Gospel calls a witness to the light. The ancient world in which John lived and spoke longed for light, perhaps especially out of their fear of darkness. Human beings, in fact, have long associated the dark with uncertainty and danger; the fear of darkness is primal, an evolutionary trait we developed from being more vulnerable to predators at nighttime. It is why the scriptures can so often associate sin and death with darkness. We feel our strength weakened in the face of temptation; sin reminds us of our vulnerability and frailty. The Phantom of the Opera might overly romanticise the night, but we nod in agreement as he sings about the senses silently abandoning their defences in the 'darkness which you know you cannot fight'. Death, on the other hand, is the greatest uncertainty for us. It is the tragic and terrifying realm of impossibility; the ultimate darkness that we face as human beings. All of us feel powerless before it.

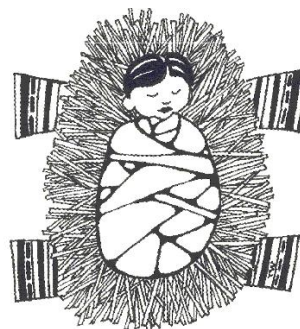
Significantly, it is in conjunction with the themes of darkness and death that the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, proclaimed at the Mass of Christmas Day, asserts the gifts that Christ brings, or rather, the gift that Christ himself is; light and life. Its proclamation, in fact, begins a note that continues to sound throughout the Christmas Octave; that it is only against this backdrop of darkness and death that we can fully appreciate the gifts of light and life. Those who continue to participate in the liturgical celebrations of the Octave, after all, notice how quickly Christmas turns 'red' in the liturgy. On just the second day of Christmas, we commemorate the first martyr of the early Church, Stephen. On the fourth day, we honour all the innocent children who were slaughtered at the orders of Herod. The day after, the fifth day of Christmas, is also the commemoration of the bishop Thomas Becket, martyred while he was celebrating Mass in his Cathedral in Canterbury. We might wonder what

happened to the glad tidings announced to the shepherds; why such focus on suffering and death instead.

The Gospel Reading of Christmas Day prepares us well for this turn. Lest we get trapped in the merriment and sentimentality we see all around, or dwell only on the more cheerful parts of the Christmas story, it reminds us that when the Son of God entered our world that first Christmas, he entered a world trapped in its sin and self-destructiveness, a world that needed to be redeemed. The Christmas story is not simply a pious fable about a cute baby in the crib; it is the story of the Son of God who took on our humanity at a great cost. It is not just a story of shepherds hastening to see a newborn child, or the Magi bringing him gifts, but also of murderous tyrants desperate to hold on to their power at any cost, and a chosen people found asleep and disinterested. It is a story of a world animated by love and beauty, but also disfigured and haunted by sin and death. It is a story where the shadow of the Cross already falls over the crib; a story where the newborn child of the tender Mother of God will also be the Crucified One. It is the story of the Light that shines in the darkness and the Lord of Life who pitched his tent in the shadow of death.

Too often, celebrations of Christmas can feel saccharine. They offer an easy escape from reality, however brief, for those looking for it. No one wants to be a killjoy. When Christians gather to celebrate the Incarnation, though, we are called to enter more fully into the brokenness and suffering of the world, and there, in that place of sharing the world's pain and sorrow, to claim our prophetic vocation and witness to the light that cannot be overcome. Our liturgical celebrations of Christmas ought not to be disconnected from the realities of the world in which we live. We must face and name the frightening darkness that surrounds and so often threatens to envelop us—the darkness of war and conflict, the darkness of prejudice and hatred, the darkness of poverty and injustice, the darkness of the ecological disaster to which we seem bent on pushing ourselves, the darkness of isolation and despair and hopelessness felt by so many today, and even the darkness of our own hearts. Christians do not stand apart from all of this. And yet, we must also, like John, continue to announce the Gospel of Life and Light; the Good News that God loves our world, and us, so much that God became flesh, like us, in Jesus. Our world, still stalked by darkness and death, needs heralds of the dawn of redeeming grace and witnesses to love's pure light; messengers who say even—and especially—from the pits of darkness. Christ the Saviour is born.

**You will find a baby  
wrapped in swaddling  
clothes lying  
in a manger.**



# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

The Son of God who has taken his place in heaven is also our brother who knows our humanity. Through him, let us offer our prayers to the Father for the salvation of the world.

## Petitions

That the Church, renewed by the light of Christ, may become more fully an instrument of justice, truth, and love in the world.

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

That the celebration of Christ's birth will lead us all to discover the profound dignity of human life.

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

That the Lord will turn the hearts of nations away from the madness of war and violence.

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

That those forced to leave their homelands might find welcome, shelter, and healing in the nations in which they seek refuge.

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

That those lonely and isolated, those vulnerable and forgotten, and those on the margins of society may experience the love of their sisters and brothers in the Christian community.

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

That our families may experience the healing grace of Christ and be witnesses to his light and life this Christmas.

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

## Conclusion

God of inexhaustible mercy, we stand before you, asking that your light shine anew on the darkness of our world and that our needs be answered. Restore all that sin has destroyed, heal what human folly has wounded, and make us witnesses of your salvation to the world. We ask this in the name of Christ our Lord and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

## Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

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&S1	S&S2
All the ends of the earth (Fisher)	5	75	
All the ends of the earth (Canedo)			270
All the ends of the earth (Hurd)			271
Born this day			296
Emmanuel	40		
Let the season shine	87		
Sing to the Lord a new song			272

## Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

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

	CWB	GA	JOBC	LPSF	PM 1
Psalm 97	185, 598	57	pg. 12	pg. 14	pg. 72

## 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]