

Christmas Day, Year C

GOSPEL

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[Here we use the gospel reading for Midnight Mass.]

Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken. This census—the first—took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to be registered. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David's house and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn. In the countryside close by there were shepherds who lived in the fields and took it in turns to watch their flocks during the night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And suddenly with the angel there was a great throng of the heavenly host, praising God and singing:

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour.'

(Luke 2:1-14)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- There are different gospel readings for each of the Christmas Masses: midnight, dawn and during the day. This gospel is the reading for midnight Mass.
- Luke gives a number of historical details about the time when Jesus is born through the mention of Augustus and Quirinius. He is keen to stress that Jesus enters human history in a particular place and time.
- The date of Christmas, 25 December, was dictated by the pagan feast of the 'unconquered sun', which occurred at the time of the northern hemisphere's winter solstice. The Church 'Christianised' this feast to celebrate the birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Luke's account of the birth of Jesus is very different from Matthew's, and this serves to remind us that we must read these as religious rather than historical stories. Luke goes to great lengths to situate Jesus in human history. He is born in a specific time and place. It shows how God works through human beings, human agencies and human institutions. No one could be further removed from Mary and Joseph than the Emperor of Rome, but it is through Augustus' edict that the words of the prophets of Israel are fulfilled. Nevertheless, this astonishing news 'of great joy' is not given to the powerful but to the poor.

Overwhelmingly, this gospel leaves us with a sense of great rejoicing, both in heaven and on earth. God has come among us!

- When was the last time you truly 'rejoiced' at receiving some news? What form did that rejoicing take?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'Do not be afraid. Listen! I bring you tidings of great joy.' What have been the joyful experiences of your life?
- How do you now experience the joy of this great day?
- What must we do to 'enjoy God's favour'?
- In this season of gift-giving, reflect on the gifts you have received over the years. What gifts have been especially treasured? What was the best present you ever received? On a deeper level, what do you regard as your most treasured gift as a human being? How do you share your giftedness? How do others share their giftedness with you? Share your reflections with the group.
- Share good news with someone this week. Be conscious of who brings good news to you.
- Proclaim God's glory often this season.

*Glory to God in the highest heaven
and peace to God's people on earth.*

