

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 provides several historical details about the time when Jesus was born through the mention of Augustus and Quirinius. He keenly stresses that Jesus entered human history at a specific place and time.
- The date of Christmas, 25 December, was linked to the pagan feast of the 'unconquered sun', which occurred during the northern hemisphere's winter solstice. The Church then '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 strongly differs from Matthew's—and this serves to remind us that we must read these texts as religious rather than historical stories. Luke goes to great lengths to situate Jesus in human history, underscoring that he was born at a specific time and place. This highlights 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' after receiving some news? What form did your 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. Which ones have you especially treasured? What was the best present you ever received? On a deeper level, what do you believe is 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.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

Christmas Day is the climax of the second great season of the Church's year (Advent/Christmas); however, the season of Christmastide continues for several more weeks as aspects of this child are further revealed. Christmas Day celebrates the mystery of the incarnation, which signifies that, in Jesus, God took human flesh, lived a human life and was fully one of us. As humans, of course we cannot see God; but through Jesus, we see God's plans for us fully revealed. St Augustine, a great thinker of the early church, put it this way:

*How much you have loved us, O God.
If your word had not become flesh
and had not dwelt among us,
we would have had to believe
that there was no connection
between God and humanity
and we would have been in despair.*

- We believe that Jesus is the decisive revelation of God. What does the Christmas story show us about God?
- Talk about how you have celebrated Christmas in the past. What will be different for you this year?

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- How does your parish usually celebrate this season of joy and rejoicing? Will the celebration be different this year? Are there special rituals or gatherings that catechumens could participate in?
- How does your community proclaim the birth of light into the world? How will you bear this light into the world this year?
- If you can, process with candles to the parish crib for the final prayer. Sing 'O come, all ye faithful' (GA 287) as you go.
- Pray for each other and for the world, which is in so much need of light and joy. You could adapt the prayer of exorcism in the RCIA at §94C. Conclude with a carol that celebrates the birth of Christ.

NOTES
