



THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL

(JOHN 1:1-18)

The stories on which we have been reflecting over the past few weeks from the accounts of Matthew and Luke focus on the conception and birth of the Son of God.

The writer of the Fourth Gospel, whom we usually call “John”, begins his presentation of Jesus and his message with a profound reflection on the mystery of the Word which existed with God from the very beginning and took flesh as a human being in the person of Jesus. The evangelist expressed this as “pitching his tent among us”. But why? Jesus is God’s Word, God’s invitation to human beings to accept their true nature as children of God. This is an offer, not a demand. Throughout Israel’s history, God reached out to the people, offering a covenant, a relationship of sharing life and love, not for any merit on their part, but simply out of God’s free choice. When the people fell short in their living out of the covenant, God always offered the chance of being forgiven and renewing the bond.

In the person of Jesus, we see God’s ultimate offer of such a relationship: not one of duty or obligation, but a free response on our part to what God has done for us in reaching out in this way. God is presenting us with a gift: it is up to us to accept or refuse it on an ongoing basis, not just once and for all. ■

REFLECT

Christmas is very much a time for giving presents. Most homes have a tree under which the brightly wrapped gifts are laid awaiting the excitement of being opened on Christmas Day. Gifts are important, not necessarily because of what they are but because of what they mean. If we suspect that someone is giving us a present out of a sense of obligation, then the object itself will not be of much interest to us. But if we realise that something, maybe apparently of little objective value, is an expression of love and affection, then it is something we are likely to treasure for a long time.

Today, we celebrate God’s greatest gift to us, that of God’s love in the person of Jesus. This is not a gift that we are supposed to put away safely in a cupboard and bring out every Christmas and Easter, but one which should be part of our daily life, a gift that we refer to as our faith. The old Catechism described faith as “a response to revelation”: at the feast of the Nativity (the birth) of the Lord, we are again presented with God’s clearest statement of the Word, and we are invited to respond once more as grateful disciples of Jesus.

LEARN

There is no infancy narrative, no story of the conception and birth of Jesus, in the Gospel according to John.

Jesus as the Word of God corresponds to the female figure of Wisdom in the Jewish Hebrew and Greek scriptures.

The feast of Christmas replaced the pagan Roman festival of Saturnalia: that is why it is celebrated in December.

SAY

Thank you, God, for the gift of your Word to me.

DO

As you unwrap your present, think of the person who gave it to you and their reason for doing so. Then remember Jesus in the crib as God’s present to you and God’s reason for sending you this gift.



Our faith is not something static, a set of statements which we recite in the Creed: it is a living, developing relationship with the Lord. If we think of it as a gift, it is more like a plant than a picture. Or we might think of it as a Russian doll: each time we open it, there is another one inside. But we have to open it to discover the next layer. As we look at the Christmas crib scene, we might remember that we are being invited to become part of the mystery which we contemplate. ■

MASS DURING THE NIGHT**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

The Lord said to me: You are my Son.
It is I who have begotten you this day.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

COLLECT

O God, who have made this most sacred night
radiant with the splendour of the true light,
grant, we pray, that we, who have known the
mysteries of his light on earth,
may also delight in his gladness in heaven...
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 9:1-7

PSALM

Psalm 95

Response:

Today a saviour has been born to us:
he is Christ the Lord.

SECOND READING

Titus 2:11-14

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

I bring you news of great joy:
today a saviour has been born to us, Christ
the Lord.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Luke 2:1-14

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
(all kneel during the next three lines)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,

and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the oblation of this day's feast
be pleasing to you, O Lord, we pray,
that through this most holy exchange
we may be found in the likeness of Christ, in
whom our nature is united to you...
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

The Word became flesh, and we have seen
his glory.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant us, we pray, O Lord our God,
that we, who are gladdened by participation
in the feast of our Redeemer's Nativity,
may through an honourable way of life
become worthy of union with him...
Amen.

MASS AT DAWN**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Today a light will shine upon us, for the Lord
is born for us;
and he will be called Wondrous God,
Prince of peace, Father of future ages:
and his reign will be without end.

COLLECT

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that, as we are bathed in the new radiance of
your incarnate Word,
the light of faith, which illumines our minds,
may also shine through in our deeds...
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 62:11-12

PSALM

Psalm 96

Response:

This day new light will shine upon the earth:
the Lord is born for us.

SECOND READING

Titus 3:4-7

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

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

GOSPEL

Luke 2:15-20

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May our offerings be worthy, we pray, O Lord,
of the mysteries of the Nativity this day,
that, just as Christ was born a man and also
shone forth as God,

so these earthly gifts may confer on us what
is divine...
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Rejoice, O Daughter Zion; lift up praise,
Daughter Jerusalem;
Behold, your King will come, the Holy One
and Saviour of the world.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant us, Lord, as we honour with joyful
devotion
the Nativity of your Son,
that we may come to know with fullness of
faith
the hidden depths of this mystery
and to love them ever more and more...
Amen.

MASS DURING THE DAY**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

A child is born for us, and a son is given to us;
his sceptre of power rests upon his shoulder,
and his name will be called Messenger of
great counsel.

COLLECT

O God, who wonderfully created the dignity
of human nature
and still more wonderfully restored it,
grant, we pray,
that we may share in the divinity of Christ,
who humbled himself to share in our
humanity...
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 52:7-10

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

PSALM

Psalm 97

Response:

All the ends of the earth have seen the
salvation of our God.

SECOND READING

Hebrews 1:1-6

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

A hallowed day has dawned upon us.
Come, you nations, worship the Lord,
for today a great light has shone down upon
the earth.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

John 1:1-18

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Make acceptable, O Lord, our oblation on this
solemn day,
when you manifested the reconciliation
that makes us wholly pleasing in your sight
and inaugurated for us the fullness of divine
worship...
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

All the ends of the earth have seen the
salvation of our God.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant, O merciful God,
that, just as the Saviour of the world, born
this day,
is the author of divine generation for us,
so he may be the giver even of immortality...
Amen.