

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
SOLEMNITY OF THE NAVITY OF THE LORD
DECEMBER 25, 2023**

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah: 52:7-12	Sing for joy. There is good news coming!
Hebrews 1:1-6	Now God speaks to the people through the Son.
John 1:1-18	The Word of God is one with us, living in our midst.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel, since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faith community and does not necessarily answer any questions which an individual may have. We simply ask, "What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear?" We listen to the word with that question in mind.

John:

The Prologue of John's Gospel proclaims God's unfathomable love for his people. He who was with God from the beginning, he through whom the world was made has now come into the very midst of the human race to share fully in our human condition, to be one with us in our living and in our dying. The Word, spoken by God from all eternity, takes on human flesh to live on earth in the neighborhood of men and women, to share their joys and their sorrows, to reconcile us all to the heavenly Father.

The Word is made flesh; the Word becomes a man; the Word of God is now spoken in a concrete expression of total love. God is with us! John's Gospel boldly carves out a new territory of divine revelation in proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth is one and the same with the Word of God made flesh for our salvation. God has come into the realm of human beings so as to bring them into the divine realm.

Whereas the Hebrew tradition had celebrated the wonder of God's dwelling with his people with signs and wonders in the desert of Sinai, in the Temple glory of Jerusalem, in the covenant of love with the law, now God has gone to the ultimate length possible: God has become one of the very people he wants to save.

Light has shown in the darkness so that darkness itself might become light.

Jesus is the Christ, the Lord and Savior. The Word was God. And he is now born as one of us, in our very midst, in "our neighborhood."

Isaiah:

The Book of Isaiah in the Bible has three different authors: Chapters 1-39, written before the Exile in Babylon; Chapters 40-55, written during the Exile; and Chapters 56-66, written after the Exile. All three parts were put into a single book by a later editor. Today, in the passage for the Christmas Mass, we hear a message of "hope and return" from the Second Isaiah. God's people will

come back to Jerusalem with power and glory. The city lies in ruin; its watchmen will be the first to hear of the people returning with God in their midst to the holy city. The Lord will lead the people home with comfort, peace, joy, and salvation.

Hebrews:

The author from the Book of Hebrews takes a hymn from the Book of Wisdom (7:26) and adapts it to Christ. God reveals himself totally in Jesus Christ. There was a time when God spoke through others. Now that God's time is fulfilled, God himself is present in Jesus of Nazareth. There is no need to speak through someone else. Since God is totally revealed in Jesus, the communication is complete. Christ is superior even to the angels who are God's messengers. In Jesus, God is fully present and does not need any other intermediary.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe the joy that comes to you, to your family, to your group, or to your parish, as it comes to the realization that God has come close to you in the birth of Jesus Christ during the Christmastime.
2. Describe the many ways in which the world of today needs a Savior as much as the world of the 1st century.
3. What is the role of the Church today in proclaiming the news that Jesus Christ has come with love and salvation for all the people of the world?
4. How can you and your family radiate the truth of "God among us" to the world in which we live?

PRAYER

**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.**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Every year, in all three Cycles (A, B, & C), the lessons for Christmas are the same. For the Christmas vigil: Isaiah 62:1-5; Acts 13:1-17, 22-25; Matthew 1:1-25. Mass at midnight: Isaiah 9:1-6; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14. Mass at dawn: Isaiah 62:11-12; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:15-20. And Mass during the day: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrew 1:1-16; John 1:1-18.

The Gospel for Christmas Day (John 1:1-18) is often a disappointment for people who come only to that one Mass for Christmas. It is abstract and deeply theological; most people do not understand it as having anything to do with Christmas or the Christmas story. The Word of God is one with us, living in our midst. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us....” “No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.”

When I was a parish priest, I did something thoroughly unliturgical for the Mass during the day: I would proclaim the Gospel for the Midnight Mass and follow it with a proclamation of the Gospel of John (1:1-18). At least the people got to hear the Christmas story at that Mass.

The Nicene Creed tells the whole world what we believe: “I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God...” For us and for our salvation, “he came down from heaven and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains further what we believe: “The Word became flesh.” “The Word became flesh for us *in order to save us by reconciling us with God.*” “The Word became flesh for us *so that we might know God's love.*” “The Word became flesh *to be our model of holiness.*” “The Word became flesh to make us *‘partakers of the divine nature.’*” “Taking up St. John’s expression, ‘The Word became flesh,’ the Church calls ‘incarnation’ the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it.”

Christmas is the Feast of the Incarnation of the Lord, the Son of God, who took on our human nature. He became one with us in everything *except sin.*

See: Catechism: #456-483

© 2017 Rev. Clement D. Thibodeau. All rights reserved.