



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 22nd December 2013 - The Fourth Sunday of Advent

1 Relax & Remember

Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

Taken from the Gospel for Sunday 22nd December 2013 - Emmanuel (Matthew 1:18-24)

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel", a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.



3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

*Matthew begins his Gospel about the birth of Jesus with a long and elaborately formal genealogy of Joseph. But Jesus is the son of Mary, not of Joseph! The whole point of this story is that Joseph is not the genealogical father of Jesus, but adopts Jesus into his line, the line of King David. At first Joseph is hesitant to do so, presumably thinking that he is unworthy to acknowledge the child as his own, and unworthy to bond with Mary who is with child by the Holy Spirit. But the angel insists that only Joseph can do this job ('Do not be afraid,' he says). As soon as the child is born, he is given the name Jesus, and is given it by Joseph. It is the father's prerogative to name a son, and by so doing Joseph takes the child as his own. We hear little more of Joseph, but what a joy it must have been to have Jesus as a son! What a relationship there must have been! What responsibility too! When Jesus calls God his 'Father', he is using something of the concept of 'father' which must have been formed in his mind by his adoptive father, Joseph, the perfect ideal of the loving parent. **Why is it important that Jesus should be adopted into David's line? What sort of father would Joseph have been, and what can we learn from him?***

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 22nd December 2013



First Reading: *The Virgin is with Child*

Isaiah 7:10-14

The Lord spoke to Ahaz and said, 'Ask the Lord your God for a sign for yourself coming either from the depths of Sheol or from the heights above.' 'No,' Ahaz answered, 'I will not put the Lord to the test.' Then Isaiah said: 'Listen now, House of David: are you not satisfied with trying the patience of men without trying the patience of my God, too? The Lord himself, therefore, will give you a sign. It is this: the maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel, a name which means "God-is-with-us".'

The readings of the last Sunday of Advent always focus on Mary, as she waits for her child to be born. The prophecy in this first reading was given in 736 BC, when King Ahaz of Judah was about to be forced into an alliance, in a vain attempt to oppose the crushing military power of Assyria. Isaiah goes to him and warns him that the alliance would be fatal; he had better trust in the Lord. Isaiah promises a sign, which Ahaz refuses. He does not want to be convinced! What is this sign? The original Hebrew reads, 'A girl is with child and will bear a son', indicating that within a few months the threat will vanish and Jerusalem will be convinced that God is on their side – hence the boy will be called Emmanuel, in relieved gratitude. But the Greek translation of the Hebrew, made some 200 years before the birth of Jesus, translates 'The virgin is with child', which the evangelist Matthew sees as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus from the virgin Mary. The symbolic name Emmanuel then becomes a promise of the presence of God in the world at our side.

Why do you think King Ahaz was reluctant to ask God for a sign? Do you believe that God still gives signs today?

Second Reading: *The Son of God in Power*

Romans 1:1-7

From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus who has been called to be an apostle, and specially chosen to preach the Good News that God promised long ago through his prophets in the scriptures. This news is about the Son of God, who, according to the human nature he took, was a descendant of David: it is about Jesus Christ our Lord who, in the order of the spirit, the spirit of holiness that was in him, was proclaimed Son of God in all his power through his resurrection from the dead. Through him we received grace and our apostolic mission to preach the obedience of faith to all pagan nations in honour of his name. You are one of these nations, and by his call belong to Jesus Christ. To you all, then, who are God's beloved in Rome, called to be saints, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send grace and peace.

This reading gives us the beginning of the great Letter to the Romans, in which Paul lays out the saving work of Christ. After proclaiming his apostolic office, Paul presents Jesus to us. In his introductions to the letters, Paul always briefly mentions or hints at the subject with which he is especially concerned in the letter. So here it is the dual aspect of Christ. If he were not both wholly human and Son of God, then Jesus' supreme act of obedience on the Cross would not have saved us. And yet, it is by his resurrection that he lifts his followers to perfection in the divine life, for we are baptized into his death and rise in his resurrection. According to his human nature he is a descendant of David, wholly human. At the same time he is Son of God in power through his resurrection from the dead. Paul does not, of course, suggest that before the resurrection Jesus was not Son of God, but in some way the resurrection manifested Jesus' full power as Son of God. The Incarnation (God becoming flesh) is the basis of all the theology of Salvation (humanity sharing fully in the divine life).

After describing himself, St Paul goes on to give a brief description of Jesus' life. How would you briefly describe Jesus' life? How would you describe your own Christian mission?

“Both wholly human and Son of God.”

The Wednesday Word: *Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God*

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