

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

The shepherds went in haste,
and found Mary and Joseph and the Infant
lying in a manger.

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 were pleased to give us
the shining example of the Holy Family,
graciously grant that we may imitate them
in practising the virtues of family life and in
the bonds of charity,
and so, in the joy of your house,
delight one day in eternal rewards.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Genesis 15:1-6;21:1-3

A reading from the book of Genesis.

The word of the Lord was spoken to Abram
in a vision, 'Have no fear, Abram, I am your
shield; your reward will be very great.'

"My Lord," Abram replied "what do you
intend to give me? I go childless ..." Then
Abram said, "See, you have given me no
descendants; some man of my household
will be my heir." And then this word of the
Lord was spoken to him, "He shall not be
your heir; your heir shall be one of your own
flesh and blood". Then taking him outside he
said, "Look up to heaven and count
the stars if you can. Such will be your
descendants" he told him. Abram put his
faith in the Lord, who counted this as making
him justified.

The Lord dealt kindly with Sarah as he had
said, and did what he had promised her. So
Sarah conceived and bore a son to
Abraham in his old age, at the time God had
promised. Abraham named the son born to
him Isaac, the son to whom
Sarah had given birth.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 104

Response:

He, the Lord, is our God.

He remembers his covenant for ever.

1. Give thanks to the Lord, tell his name,
make known his deeds among the
peoples.
O sing to him, sing his praise;
tell all his wonderful works! (R.)
2. Be proud of his holy name,
let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice.
Consider the Lord and his strength;
constantly seek his face. (R.)
3. Remember the wonders he has done,
his miracles, the judgements he spoke.
O children of Abraham, his servant,
O sons of the Jacob he chose. (R.)
4. He remembers his covenant for ever,
his promise for a thousand generations,
the covenant he made with Abraham,
the oath he swore to Isaac. (R.)

SECOND READING Hebrews 11:8.11-12.17-19

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the
call to set out for a country that was the
inheritance given to him and his descendants,
and that he set out without knowing where
he was going.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite
of being past the age, was made able to
conceive, because she believed that he
who had made the promise would be faithful
to it. Because of this, there came from one
man, and one who was already as good as
dead himself, more descendants than could
be counted, as many as the stars of heaven
or the grains of sand on the seashore.

It was by faith that Abraham, when put
to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered
to sacrifice his only son even though the
promises had been made to him and he had
been told: It is through Isaac that your name
will be carried on. He was confident that God
had the power even to raise the dead; and so,
figuratively speaking, he was given back
Isaac from the dead.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

At various times in the past
and in various different ways,
God spoke to our ancestors through the
prophets;

but in our own time, the last days,
he has spoken to us through his Son.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Luke 2:22-40

(For Shorter Form, read between > <)

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to
Luke.

>When the day came for them to be purified
as laid down by the Law of Moses, the
parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem
to present him to the Lord< - observing
what stands written in the law of the Lord:
Every first-born male must be consecrated
to the Lord - and also to offer in sacrifice, in
accordance with what is said in the Law of
the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two
young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was
a man named Simeon. He was an upright
and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's
comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him.
It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit
that he would not see death until he had set

eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by
the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when
the parents brought in the child Jesus to do
for him what the Law required, he took him
into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

"Now, Master, you can let your servant go
in peace,
just as you promised;
because my eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared for all the nations
to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and
the glory of your people Israel."

As the child's father and mother stood there
wondering at the things that were being said
about him, Simeon blessed them and said
to Mary his mother, "You see this child: he
is destined for the fall and for the rising of
many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is
rejected - and a sword will pierce your own
soul too - so that the secret thoughts of many
may be laid bare."

There was a prophetess also, Anna, the
daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.
She was well on in years. Her days of
girlhood over, she had been married for
seven years before becoming a widow. She
was now eighty-four years old and never
left the Temple, serving God night and day
with fasting and prayer. She came by just
at that moment and began to praise God;
and she spoke of the child to all who looked
forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

>When they had done everything the
Law of the Lord required, they went back to
Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and
he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour
was with him.

The Gospel of the Lord.<

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

We offer you, Lord, the sacrifice of
conciliation,
humbly asking that,
through the intercession of the Virgin Mother
of God and Saint Joseph,
you may establish our families firmly in your
grace and your peace.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Our God has appeared on the earth, and
lived among us.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Bring those you refresh with this heavenly
Sacrament,
most merciful Father,
to imitate constantly the example of the Holy
Family,
so that, after the trials of this world,
we may share their company for ever.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

31ST DECEMBER 2017

Sunday Message

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

THE WORD

Year B • Season Colour: White • Psalter Week 1



JESUS,
MARY AND
JOSEPH

Luke's account of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus is written against the background of stories and personalities from the Hebrew scriptures, which we call the Old Testament.

The source for the narrative of the presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple is the childhood of the prophet Samuel. His parents, Elkanah and Hannah are devout people, so the fact that they are childless is a bewildering misfortune. They received their son after divine intervention made conception possible, and they bring him to the shrine to present him to the Lord as they are required to by the Law. The elderly priest, Eli, accepts him and blesses the parents. Luke includes the figure of Anna, just as he will pay attention to the presence of women in the main part of his written work. Simeon and Anna represent those people who wait for the Lord and long for redemption. By placing them together, Luke tells us that *man and woman stand together and side by side before God. They are equal in honour and grace, they are endowed with the same gifts and have the same responsibilities.*

The focus of the episode is Simeon's prayer which signals that in the person of Jesus, God's promise has been fulfilled, not just for Israel, but for all peoples. God's universal care for human beings is an important theme in the Third Gospel. The fact that Jesus will be rejected is also foreshadowed in what Simeon says to Mary. The sword which will pierce Mary's soul is not that of sorrow at the crucifixion of her son (Luke does not show her as being present at the Cross) but the sword of judgment which cuts to the very being of every person to reveal who they really are. ■

REFLECT

Many parents are deeply grieved when their children give up the practice of the faith. They ask themselves, *Where did we go wrong? What more could we have done?* The answer, usually, is that *You didn't and You couldn't have.* Everyone has to make up their own mind whether or not they believe. Not even the best-prepared and best-presented catechetical programme can guarantee that the student will graduate as a full-fledged believing Christian. There is a lot of truth in the saying that children are catechized before they are evangelized: this means that they are taught the beliefs of the community before they have decided that they actually believe in God or in the person of Jesus. That is what the sword which will pierce Mary's soul is all about: we should read the whole of the sentence which continues, *so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.* One scholar notes that *Mary, too, the model believer, will have to decide for or against God's revelation in Jesus; family ties do not create faith.* Parents, catechists and preachers can only do their best: the decision whether or not to believe rests with the individual. ■

LEARN

A frequent theme in biblical writing is that of the elderly righteous couple who have no children.

This is a literary device to highlight the importance of the child who will be born: it is found in the Hebrew bible (e.g. the parents of Samuel) and in the Christian scriptures (the parents of John the Baptist).

Childlessness was regarded as a judgment of God and often as the result of sin: hence the double tragedy in the case of a righteous and devout couple.

Blessing and cursing are connected with God's giving or withholding fertility: in the case of an aged couple without children, God is seen as being somehow responsible for the problem and then its resolution.

SAY

May the peace of Christ
reign in your heart:
May the message of Christ
find a home in you.

DO

The next time you see (or hold) a child, remember that God decided to fulfil his promises by coming into our world as a baby, not for the sake of the few, or the many, but for all.

