

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

When a profound silence covered all things
and night was in the middle of its course,
your all-powerful Word, O Lord, bounded
from heaven's royal throne.

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

Almighty ever-living God,
splendour of faithful souls,
graciously be pleased to fill the world with
your glory,
and show yourself to all people by the
radiance of your light.
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

Ecc 24:1-2, 8-12

A reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus
Wisdom speaks her own praises,
in the midst of her people she glorifies in
herself.
She opens her mouth in the assembly of the
Most High,
she glorifies in herself in the presence of the
Mighty One;
"Then the creator of all things instructed me,
and he who created me fixed a place for my
tent.
He said 'Pitch your tent in Jacob,
make Israel your inheritance.'
From eternity, in the beginning, he created
me,
and for eternity I shall remain.
I ministered before him in the holy
tabernacle,
and thus was I established on Zion.
In the beloved city he has given me rest,
and in Jerusalem I wield my authority.
I have taken root in a privileged people,
in the Lord's property, in his inheritance."

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Ps 147

Response:
**The Word was made flesh,
and lived among us.**
or Alleluia

1. O praise the Lord, Jerusalem!
Zion, praise your God!
He has strengthened the bars of your
gates,
he has blessed the children within you. (R.)
2. He established peace on your borders,
he feeds you with finest wheat.
He sends out his word to the earth
and swiftly runs his command. (R.)
3. He makes his word known to Jacob,
to Israel his laws and decrees.
He has not dealt thus with other nations;
he has not taught them his decrees (R.)

SECOND READING

Eph 1:3-6, 15-18

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the
Ephesians
Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ, who has blessed us with all the
spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ. Before
the world was made, he chose us, chose us
in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live
through love in his presence, determining
that we should become his adopted sons,
through Jesus Christ, for his own kind
purposes, to make us praise the glory of his
grace, his free gift to us in the Beloved.
That will explain why I, having once heard
about your faith in the Lord Jesus, and the
love that you show towards all the saints, have
never failed to remember you in my prayers
and to thank God for you. May the God of
our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,
give you a spirit of wisdom and perception
of what is revealed, to bring you to full
knowledge of him. May he enlighten the eyes
of your mind so that you can see what hope
his call holds for you, what rich glories he has
promised the saints will inherit.
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, Alleluia!
Glory be to you, O Christ, proclaimed to the
pagans;
Glory be to you, O Christ, believed in by the
world.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Jn 1:1-18

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
John.
In the beginning was the Word:
the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things came to be,
not one thing had its being but through him.
All that came to be had life in him
and that life was the light of men,
a light that shines in the dark,
a light that darkness could not overpower.
A man came, sent by God.
His name was John.
He came as a witness,
as a witness to speak for the light,
so that everyone might believe through him.
He was not the light,
only a witness to speak for the light.
The Word was the true light
that enlightens all men;
and he was coming into the world.
He was in the world
that had its being through him,

and the world did not know him.
He came to his own domain
and his own people did not accept him.
But to all who did accept him
he gave power to become children of God,
to all who believe in the name of him
who was born not out of human stock
or urge of the flesh
or will of man
but of God himself.
The Word was made flesh,
he lived among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory that is his as the only Son of the
Father,
full of grace and truth.

John appears as his witness. He proclaims:
"This is the one of whom I said:
He who comes after me
ranks before me
because he existed before me."
Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us,
received –
yes, grace in return for grace,
since though the law was given through
Moses,
grace and truth have come through Jesus
Christ.
No one has ever seen God;
it is only the Son, who is nearest to the
Father's heart,
who has made him known.
The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
(all bow during the next three lines)
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the
Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living
and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

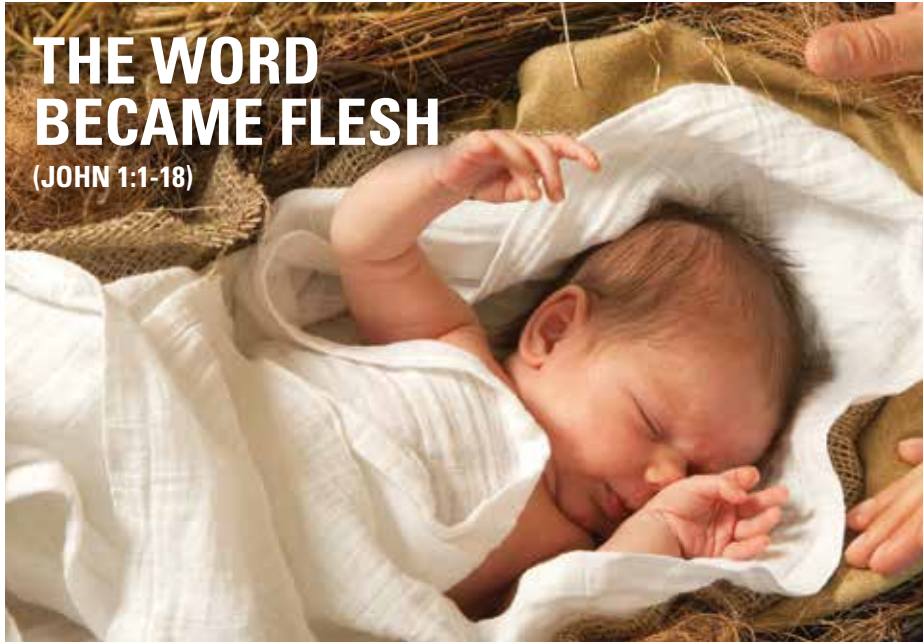
Sanctify, O Lord, the offerings we make
on the Nativity of your Only Begotten Son,
for by it you show us the way of truth
and promise the life of the heavenly Kingdom.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

To all who would accept him,
he gave the power to become children of God.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Lord our God, we humbly ask you,
that, through the working of this ministry,
our offences may be cleansed
and our just desires fulfilled.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.



THE WORD BECAME FLESH

(JOHN 1:1-18)

Today's Gospel reading is taken from the opening verses of the Fourth Gospel: it presents Jesus as the Word. The purpose of a word is to communicate, and Jesus is in himself the revelation of God.

What God wants to reveal is not a series of laws or teachings, but the Divine Self and to invite human beings into a relationship characterised by friendship. This way of understanding Jesus is different to that of the three Synoptic Gospels: here we are told about the existence of the Word with God before becoming flesh in the mystery we call the Incarnation. This is God reaching out to human beings with an invitation: Jesus presents people with this offer, and the Gospel story tells of the different responses which individuals make to it – and to him.

This way of understanding God is found in the Jewish Scriptures, where God reaches out through the feminine figure of Wisdom who existed with God before creation. Wisdom goes in search of disciples. She comes down from heaven to live among human beings, to teach them the things that are above until they can be described as friends of God: we can see Jesus acting in similar ways, and his self-awareness in John's Gospel is quite distinct from that presented by the other evangelists. ■

SAY

The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us

(John 1:14)

LEARN

The Gospel actually says "The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us."

Wisdom in the ancient world referred to the ability to achieve one's goal or purpose.

Wisdom is a feminine figure in the Bible: *Hokmah* in Hebrew and *Sophia* in Greek.

DO

Think about the way you look after your body in terms of food, drink, exercise and the like: if you are not treating it properly in some way, do something about it.



REFLECT

We sometimes hear people talking about sins of the flesh, and usually they are referring to sexual behaviour. The apostle Paul also speaks about Christ as the wisdom of God, but he could never have said that the Word became flesh. When Paul uses the term 'flesh', he often means a force opposed to God, that weak part of our human nature which sin exploits to lead us away from God and from our better self. The writer of the Fourth Gospel has a different view in this matter. He sees flesh as that aspect of life contrasted with the divine, but which is basically good:

otherwise he could never have made this bold and astonishing claim that the Word became flesh, a true human being in every way.

There is a strand in Christian thought which denigrates our human body, our physical flesh: writers who share this point of view concentrate on the soul, and regard the body as the source of all evil, so to say. Hence the body should be punished and severely disciplined. But the doctrine of the Incarnation, literally the enfleshing of the Word of God, tells us that our complete human nature is

something radically good: after all, it is part of God's creation. We should therefore treat our bodies with respect. The focus of much Catholic moral teaching is often portrayed as being on a narrow, individualistic sexual area, the obsession of celibate male clergy. The wider moral and ethical teaching of the church is based on that of the Bible, which emphasises our social responsibilities in matters of justice and the right relationships which should exist in society. To fail in these is to commit sins of the flesh. ■