

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**Drop down dew from above, you heavens,
and let the clouds rain down the Just One;
let the earth be opened and bring forth a
Saviour.**

COLLECT

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord,
your grace into our hearts,
that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ
your Son
was made known by the message of an Angel,
may by his Passion and Cross
be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Is 7:10-14

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

The Lord spoke to Ahaz and said, "Ask the
Lord your God for a sign from 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 word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Ps 23

Response:

Let the Lord enter!

He is the king of glory.

1. The Lord's is the earth and its fullness,
the world and all its peoples.
It is he who set it on the seas;
on the waters he made it firm. (R.)
2. Who shall climb the mountain of the
Lord?
Who shall stand in his holy place?
The man with clean hands and pure
heart,
who desires not worthless things. (R.)
3. He shall receive blessings from the Lord
and reward from the God who saves him.
Such are the men who seek him,
seek the face of the God of Jacob. (R.)

SECOND READING

Rm 1:1-7

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the
Romans.

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.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

**The virgin will conceive and give birth to a
son**

and they will call him Emmanuel,

a name which means "God-is-with-us".

Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mt 1:18-24

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Matthew.

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 name 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.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

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 bow 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 Holy Spirit, O Lord,
sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar,
just as he filled with his power the womb of
the Blessed Virgin Mary.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a
son;**

and his name will be called Emmanuel.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Having received this pledge of eternal
redemption,
we pray, almighty God,
that, as the feast day of our salvation draws
ever nearer,
so we may press forward all the more eagerly
to the worthy celebration of the mystery of
your Son's Nativity.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.



Stained glass window depicting the dream of St Joseph, in the Cathedral of St Rumbold in Mechelen, Belgium.

The main character in Matthew's first two chapters, the part of the Gospel often called the Birth or Infancy Narrative, is Joseph. It is to Joseph that the annunciation of the birth of Jesus is made, and Joseph is the focus of attention.

The text refers to Joseph as Son of David, and it is through Joseph that Jesus inherits the title and the promises made to that King of Israel by God through the prophet Nathan. This happens because Joseph agrees to become the legal father of Jesus, and by naming him he accepts him as his own son and the promise passes to Jesus.

Matthew presents Joseph as the model Israelite: he knows that the Law prescribes a severe penalty for his fiancée, Mary, who is pregnant and not by him. However, he is also a compassionate person and decides to resolve the situation privately and not cause her public disgrace. The evangelist casts Joseph in the mould of the Joseph of Genesis, the master of dreams, thus recalling the person who saved his family by bringing them to Egypt. The Gospel hero has a series of dreams in which God directs his actions and so brings Jesus eventually to Nazareth. ■

SAY

The maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son (Isaiah 7:14)

LEARN

Joseph was the legal, not the biological father of Jesus.

It is through Joseph that Jesus is the son of David.

The figure of Joseph in Matthew's Gospel recalls the Joseph of Genesis (he of the "coat of many colours").

DO

Try to find a statue or picture of the 'Sleeping Joseph': reflect on his call and then on your own.

REFLECT

The role of Joseph has been greatly overshadowed by that of Mary, mainly due to later Christian piety. However, in Matthew's Gospel, he is the one who facilitates God's plan and who plays the major part in the story. It is through Joseph that Matthew introduces the theme which will run through his version of the story of Jesus, that of the Exodus. In himself, Jesus will relive the experience of Israel and will fulfil the meaning of that event, which we celebrate at the Easter Vigil.

We might ponder on a human level the

experience which Joseph underwent in our episode today. Being asked to bring up someone else's child just before your wedding would be a challenge for any man. It became customary to depict Joseph as almost elderly in comparison to Mary, but he is more likely to have been of a similar age to his betrothed.

The name which the angel instructs Joseph to give to Jesus is symbolic: nowhere in the Gospel is Jesus ever called *Emmanuel*. It means that whenever we think of Jesus, we should remember that in him, God is with us, and that at

the end of the Gospel, Jesus promises to be with his disciples until the end of time. God has chosen to work in the world through human beings. That is one of the lessons of the mystery which we call the Incarnation: like Joseph and Mary, we have our part to play in making God's plan a reality. We might remember that they had to give their free consent as well. We could keep in mind all those people who offer to adopt children and bring them up as their own: in this they have the example of Joseph who adopted Jesus as his own son. ■