

**December 25, 2022**

## **Christmas Masses**

There are four sets of readings for the Masses celebrated on Christmas, each set recommended for Masses celebrated at different times of the day. All four gospels are presented here. The four different gospels recommended for different times of the day would seem to be appropriate for monastic communities where the community may have both the freedom to gather multiple times during the day and a number of priests to prepare different homilies, reflecting on the birth of Jesus from different perspectives. For pastoral reasons, a community may decide to focus on one set of readings for all its celebrations. All four gospels are given here so that individuals or groups may choose to reflect on those texts that lead them into a fuller sense of God's loving presence that is being expressed by the Christmas celebration at this point in their lives.

### **Matthew 1:1-25 (Vigil Masses)**

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king.

David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahab, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile.

After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Have you ever known anyone who was adopted or orphaned and did not know anything about who either of their parents were?
2. How often have you heard that you remind someone in your family of another particular person?

3. If Jesus had been born of Mary but looking like a person from another part of the world, what kind of a response do you think he might have gotten?
4. Joseph is told that Jesus comes to save people from their sins. Will you celebrate today with people who have forgiven you some of your sins? Will a lack of forgiveness keep you from celebrating with anyone?
5. God tells Joseph in the dream that Jesus is “Emmanuel,” “God is with us.” Where do you find God's presence in your life this day? How will that influence how you celebrate this day?

### **Luke 2: 1-14** (Midnight Masses)

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

### **Background:**

This text has inspired paintings and musical compositions. The text grounds the birth of Jesus in human history and establishes his link with the house of David. The miraculous events that are part of Jesus' birth might lead some to think this closer to fairytale than a historical event that actually took place. But Luke begins his account by placing the birth solidly within human history, when Caesar Augustus ruled and Quirinius was governor of Syria. By stating that Joseph needed to go to Bethlehem to register because he was of the house of David, Jesus also becomes established as part of the house of David. Because Jesus is born far from home, he does not enjoy the support of extended family that would normally be present for such an event. He is visited by shepherds, perhaps another subtle reference to David. Beyond grounding the birth of Jesus in the reality of human history and making clear that he is of the house of David, Luke's description of the birth reveals a God who desires to be present to the poor, the overlooked, and forgotten. It is to these that God is present from the very beginning of God's presence among us.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Do you know what was going on in the world when you were born? Did your parents and grandparents pass this kind of information on to you?
2. What kind of information do you know about your family's situation when you were born? What you know about your birth might indicate the type of things that were important to your family.
3. What are the things that are important to Luke about the birth of Jesus? Why are these things told to us and not other things instead?
4. What are some of the things you would like to know about the birth of Jesus? What do your questions tell you about what is important to you?
5. The Birth of Jesus seems to impact the heavens, but not the town of Bethlehem. Why?
6. Where will celebration of the birth of Jesus have the greatest impact in your world this year? Where will it have the least impact?
7. When you read this passage, what is it that stands out to you? What is God saying to you about the kind of relationship God desires to have with you in this reading?

**Luke 2:15-20** (Masses at Dawn)

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

**Background:**

This Mass was referred to as the Shepherd's Mass. One reason the shepherds were considered irreligious was that their daily-lived situation required them to deal with the blood and death of animals, which made them ritually unclean. For the most part they lived with the sheep they were guarding and therefore away from family, and unable to attend family and religious obligations.

Given their daily life, the fact that they would respond to the message of an angel, leave their flock and go to visit Mary, Joseph, and the infant in a manger is surprising. Then after the visit they go and tell others about their experience. Shepherds, who were normally looked down upon and most probably not used to speaking to others, announced what they had witnessed and experienced. The text does not tell us how people responded, and that is not the point here. But their experience is, and we are told they returned to their flocks glorifying and praising God.

**Reflection Questions:**

1. Who in your world would you think of like the shepherds of their world?
2. Why would it be important for shepherds to be included among the first of those to hear of God's presence in the birth of Jesus?
3. Who are the people in your community who make sure the shepherds of your world are included?
4. The shepherds were told of the birth of Jesus, but they also had to act on what they were told. How do you think that is true for you too?
5. Can you talk with God about what it is in this short gospel that speaks to you?

**John 1:1-18** (Masses During the Day)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

**Background:**

This profound gospel text states that Jesus is preexistent and agent of the created world. The text has five parts: a description of the Word's role in the creation of the world (vv. 1-5); the role of John as witness (vv. 6-8); the Word's entrance into the world (vv. 9-14); a report about John (v. 15); and acknowledgment of our participation in Christ's glory (vv. 16-18)

## Reflection Questions:

1. Do you think of Jesus as being the Word that God has spoken to reveal the mind and desire of God?
2. At Mass as part of the invitation to Communion, the priest says: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb. We respond: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." The gospel says that Jesus is the Word, and that God has spoken that Word, and that the Word is incarnate and present. Have you ever put the statement from the gospel together with the prayer that we pray at Mass? Does that have meaning for you?
3. Can you talk to God about whatever it is that comes to your mind as you think of Jesus being the Word of God?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscclalledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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## Excerpts from the readings for December 25, 2022, Nativity of the Lord (Christmas), Mass during Night

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.  
You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing,  
as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils.  
For the yoke that burdened them and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed.  
Every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for flames.  
For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests.  
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.  
His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, from David's throne, and over his kingdom,  
which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this!

*Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.*

*Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all you lands; bless his name.*

*Announce his salvation, day after day. Among all peoples, tell his wondrous deeds.*

*Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and what fills it resound;*

*Let the plains be joyful, and all the trees of the forest exult before the Lord.*

*For he comes to rule the world with justice, and the peoples with his constancy.*

Beloved: The grace of God has appeared, saving all

and training us to reject godless ways, and to live justly and devoutly as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our God and savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to deliver us from lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people eager to do what is good.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. You will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

**Excerpts above from Isaiah 9:1-6; Psalm 96: 1-3, 11-13; Timothy 2:11-14; and Luke 2:1-14**

**Excerpts from the readings for December 25, 2022, Nativity of the Lord (Christmas), Mass at Dawn**

See, the Lord proclaims to the ends of the earth: say to daughter Zion, your savior comes! Here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. They shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, and you shall be called “Frequented,” a city that is not forsaken.

*A light will shine on us this day: the Lord is born for us.  
The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice; let the many isles be glad.  
The heavens proclaim his justice, and all peoples see his glory.  
Light dawns for the just; and gladness, for the upright of heart.  
Be glad in the Lord, you just, and give thanks to his holy name.*

Beloved: When the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, He saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

**Excerpts from Isaiah 62:11-12; Psalm 97:1, 6, 11-12; Timothy 3:4-7; and Luke 2:15-20**

**From Joe:**

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for December 25th, Christmas, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. Four versions of Christmas gospels are presented, each depending on what is recommended for a different time of Christmas Eve or Christmas day. Mark's gospel does not have a nativity narrative, but each of the other three gospels has its own place at Christmas. Matthew's version with its genealogy and its focus on Joseph's perspective is recommended for Christmas Eve vigil masses. Luke's manger story with the appearance of angels to shepherds is recommended for the night masses. Where Luke's narrative continues with the shepherds' visit to the manger scene is recommended for Christmas mass at dawn. The beginning of John's gospel is the recommended gospel for mass during Christmas day. "What came to be through the Word was life, and this life was the light of the human race. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Each parish and Catholic community uses its choice of selections from these various options.

The other readings all have references related to the gospels and to the light of the coming of this Savior from God and from the line of David. For the vigil masses, in the first reading, Isaiah says, "For Jerusalem's sake, I will not be quiet until her vindication shines forth like the dawn. You shall be called by a new name, for the Lord delights in you." Psalm 96 proclaims, "They shall exult before the Lord, for he comes to rule the earth." In the second reading, from Acts, Paul says, "From David's descendants, God has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus."

For the night masses, in the first reading, Isaiah says, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. A child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests, vast and forever peaceful, from David's throne." Psalm 89 proclaims, "I will establish your throne for all generations. In the light of your countenance, O Lord, they walk." In the second reading, from his letter to Titus, Paul says, "The grace of God has appeared, saving all, our savior Jesus."

For the dawn masses, in the first reading, Isaiah says, "The Lord proclaims to the ends of the earth, your savior comes! Here with him, the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord." Psalm 97 proclaims, "The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice! Light dawns for the just, and gladness, for the upright of heart." In the second reading, from his letter to Titus, Paul says, "The generous love of God our savior appeared. He saved us through renewal by the Holy Spirit, through Jesus our savior."

For the daytime masses, in the first reading, Isaiah says, "Glad tidings, announcing peace; good news, announcing salvation. The Lord comforts his people!" Psalm 98 proclaims, "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God." In the second reading, from the letter to the Hebrews, "God has spoken to us through the Son, who is the refulgence of his glory. When he leads the firstborn into the world, he says: Let all the angels of God worship him."

We hope your celebrations of our Lord's birth are joy-filled and heartwarming. The gift of His presence in our lives is like no other. Merry Christmas!

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!