

Catholic Parish of Blackfriars



Under the care of the Dominican Fathers



VERITAS



Issue 05
25 December 2021
Year C

HOLY ROSARY CHURCH

Parish Priest
Fr Mannes Tellis OP
(To contact Please Text)
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Assistant Priest
Fr Rafael Cabezon OP

Dominican in residence
Br Francis McKinnon OP

Holy Rosary Church
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Monday, Tuesday,
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Mass Times
Monday - NO Mass
Tuesday & Thursday
6:45am
Wednesday & Friday
5:30pm
Saturday - 9:00am
Vigil - 5:pm
Sunday - 8:00am, 10:00am,
5:00pm

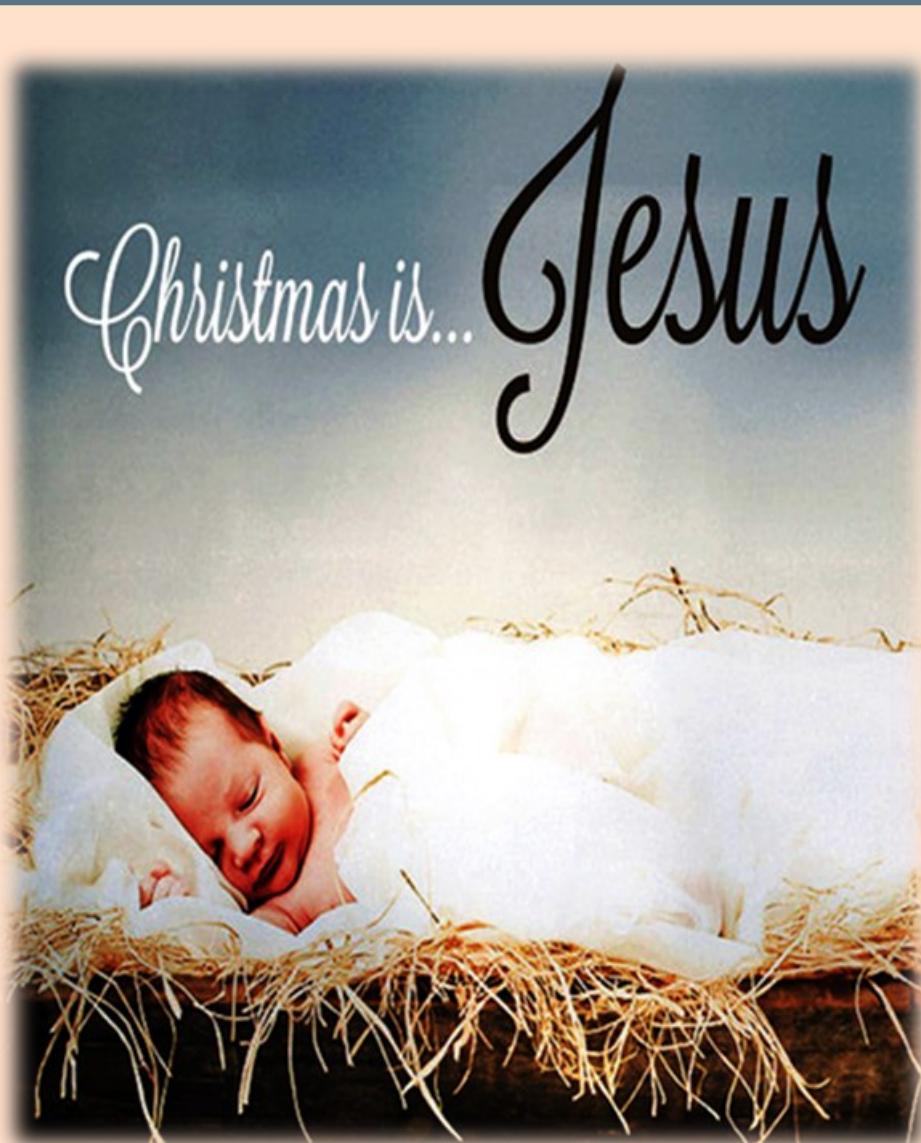
Reconciliation
Saturday 12pm–12.30pm
and 4pm–4.30pm

Adoration - Holy Hour
Tuesday 12 Noon - 1:00pm

Pray the Rosary
Before 10am Mass on Sundays

If you are in Urgent need of a Priest
out of office hours call - 6248 8253

Christmas Day



Face Masks are mandatory,
and encouraged for those 12 years and over.

Christmas Vigil

6:00pm



FIRST READING

First Reading: Isaiah 62:1-5

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

For Zion's sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not grow weary, until her integrity shines out like the dawn and her salvation flames like a torch.

The nations then will see your integrity, all the kings your glory, and you will be called by a new name, one which the mouth of the Lord will confer. You are to be a crown of splendour in the hand of the Lord, a princely diadem in the hand of your God; no longer are you to be named 'Forsaken', nor your land 'Abandoned', but you shall be called 'My Delight' and your land 'The Wedded'; for the Lord takes delight in you and your land will have its wedding.

Like a young man marrying a virgin, so will the one who built you wed you, and as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Responsorial Psalm: 88:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29

For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

'I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:
I will establish your dynasty for ever
and set up your throne through all ages.'

Happy the people who acclaim such a king,
who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face,
who find their joy every day in your name,
 who make your justice
 the source of their bliss.

'He will say to me: "You are my father,
 my God, the rock who saves me."
I will keep my love for him always;
for him my covenant shall endure.'

For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

SECOND READING

Second Reading: Acts 13:16-17, 22-25

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

When Paul reached Antioch in Pisidia, he stood up in the synagogue, held up a hand for silence and began to speak:

'Men of Israel, and fearers of God, listen!
The God of our nation Israel chose our ancestors, and made our people great when they were living as foreigners in Egypt; then by divine power he led them out.'

'Then he made David their king, of whom he approved in these words, "I have selected David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will carry out my whole purpose". To keep his promise, God has raised up for

SECOND READING

Cont...Israel one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Saviour, whose coming was heralded by John when he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the whole people of Israel. Before John ended his career he said, "I am not the one you imagine me to be; that one is coming after me and I am not fit to undo his sandal".

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

Tomorrow the wickedness of the earth
 will be destroyed:

the Saviour of the world
 will be our king.

Alleluia!



GOSPEL

Gospel: Matthew 1:1-25

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 call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord told him to do: he took his wife to his home and, though he had not had intercourse with her, she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.



CHRISTMAS IN OUR PARISH

Every Christmas the Christ Child in the manger at Bethlehem invites us to stop and to pay attention to the things that are especially important in our lives: our loved ones, our family and friends - and our loving God who holds us in existence, 'in the palm of his hand'. When Christmas is over, an excellent way to grow in faith and to develop one's relationship with God is to be part of our community as we celebrate the Eucharist on Sundays. You will be most welcome!

PARISH PRAYERS

For those who have died let us always remember and pray for all the souls of the faithful departed, may they rest in Christ's Peace. Let us also pray for the recently deceased in our parish and community, and for their loved ones, that they may be consoled by God's Tender Love and Divine Mercy. Let us pray for the sick, dying and housebound of our parish and community, our families and friends, the elderly, lonely, downhearted; the poor, destitute, oppressed; unemployed, homeless, helpless, addicted, prisoners, sinners and those who have no one to pray for them; for caregivers, ministers to the sick, those in nursing homes and hospice care and those in or recently released from the hospital.

Our sick

Greg O'Neill, Ruth Burke, Frank Zobec, Anne Corver, Carol Hallam, Mary Martin, Barbara Wilson, Philip Bailey, June Pollard, Ursula Ramsay, Edith Jensen, Peter Catlin, Fr Ellis Clifford, Mimma Gia, Awny El-Ghitany, Bob Hackett, Joe Schimizzi, Rosa Maria Santos, Margaret Sullivan, Mary Lou Pentony, Elizabeth Webster, Pamela Sandy, Maureen Blood, Beth Delos Santos, Terry Stephens, Bernard Druett, Denis Lawrence, Patricia Zorzi, Veronica & Paul Cornelly, Gwen Gleeson

Recently Deceased

Stephen Medza

Anniversaries

Zelma & Bill McManus, Labib Jazrawi

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Father God,

When your precious Son became a tiny baby
in a stable in Bethlehem in poverty
and simplicity, you changed our world.

As we imagine those surroundings,
we join with the shepherds and the
wise men in wonder and praise.

We thank you for our material lives,
praise you for our spiritual lives,
and trust in you for our eternal life. Amen.



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I'M SORRY GUY, I KNOW THAT YOU'VE GOT A
GOOD HEALTH PLAN AND YOU GIVE OUT FREE
GIFTS AND ALL, BUT JESUS REALLY DOES
HAVE A MUCH BETTER PLAN

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU

Fr Mannes, Fr Rafael, Br Francis and members of the Parish Team would like to thank all parishioners for your generosity and help during the year. We have a huge list of people to acknowledge.

'Thank You' to members of the Parish Finance Council.

'Thank You' to the Acolytes, Readers, Welcome Ministers, Musicians & Choir, Catechists, School of Religion, Counters & Collectors, Social Function, Pastoral Care, Flower Ladies, Maintenance, St Vincent de Paul, Altar Linen / Sacred Vessel Carers, Prayer, Reflection & Renewal Groups, Sausage Sizzlers, to Jim who works tirelessly away in the office and church attending to a myriad of chores and all the other quiet achievers who contribute to the life of our wonderful Parish!

*We share with you the glory, the wonder,
the miracle of this beautiful Holy Season.*

FR MANNES AWAY

Fr Mannes will be on holidays from 28th December - 25th January and on Retreat from 19th January - 23rd January. Fr Rafael will be caretaker during this time.

CHRISTMAS

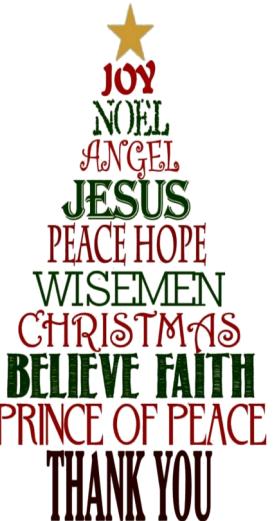
An unknown poet said: "There is a hush that comes with Christmas, life's hurry and its cares seem far away. And something in the silence seems to weave a mood akin to sadness, and yet we say, 'A merry Christmas' to all we meet. And all the while inside, we feel the mystic spell as if the Christ child came on noiseless feet, with something old yet ever new to tell. The eyes grow misty and yet they shed no tear, and those we have lost seem somehow near."

It is almost perfect, this mystic spell of Christmas. To experience the beauty of Christmas Eve is to experience a taste of the fullness of God, for Christmas has become a symbol. Christmas Eve is not merely Christmas Eve.

It is no longer merely a religious holiday. Christmas Eve itself has become a symbol for our lives of the way God intended the world to be. Christmas symbolises our need for sanity in a crazy mixed up world of hate and fear.

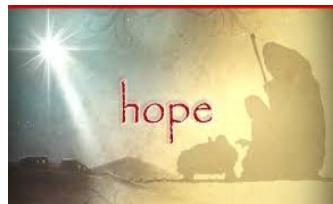
CHRISTMAS SPEAKS

Christmas speaks to the depths of our hearts. With the demands which press on us at this time of the year, we may feel we fall short in 'doing justice' to Christmas. This is not surprising as it celebrates the mystery of the Infinite One taking human form and coming to live with us - to let us know how deeply we are loved and how important each of us is. It's God's gift to us beyond words! 'What good does it do if Christ is born in Bethlehem but is not born in our hearts?'



Christmas Night

9:00pm



FIRST READING

First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-7

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone. You have made their gladness greater, you have made their joy increase' they rejoice in your presence, as men rejoice in your presence, as men rejoice at harvest time, as men are happy when they are dividing the spoils.

For the yoke that was weighing on him, the bar across his shoulders, the rod of his oppressor, these you break as on the day of Midian. For all the footgear of battle, every cloak rolled in blood, is burnt and son consumed by fire.

For there is a child born for us, a son given to us and dominion is laid on his shoulders' and this is the name they give him: Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.

Wide is his dominion in a peace that has no end, for the throne of David and for his royal power, which he establishes and makes secure in justice and integrity. From this time onwards and for ever, the jealous love of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Responsorial Psalm - Sung

Refrain: Today, today a Saviour has been born;
a Saviour has been born to us.

He is Christ the Lord,
Christ the Lord,
Jesus Christ the Lord.

Sing a new song to the Lord.
Sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, sing to the Lord.
Sing to the Lord, bless his name!

Refrain

Proclaim his help day by day.
Tell among the nations his glory.
Tell of his works, tell of his works,
and his wonders among
all the peoples.

Refrain

Let the heavens rejoice
and earth be glad,
let the sea

and all within it thunder praise.
All of the land, all that it bears:
rejoice at the presence
of the Lord.

Refrain

SECOND READING

Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14

A reading from the letter of St Paul to Titus

God's grace has been revealed, and it has made salvation possible for the whole human race and taught us that what we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God, and all our worldly ambitions; we must be self-restrained and live good and religious lives here in this present world, while we are waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the Appearing of the glory of our great God and saviour Christ Jesus. He sacrificed himself for us in order to set us free from all wickedness and to purify a people so that it could be his very own and would have no ambition except to do good.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Come, Holy Spirit of Life
And fill the hearts of your people
and enkindle in them
the fire of your love.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Gospel: Luke 2:1-14

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke

Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken. This census – the first – took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to be registered. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together 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 a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn. In the countryside close by there were shepherds who lived in the fields and took it in turns to watch their flocks during the night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And suddenly with the angel there was a great throng of the heavenly host, praising God and singing; 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
And peace to men who enjoy his favour'.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

OFFICE CLOSURE

Holy Rosary Church Office will close on THURSDAY
23 December AT 12.30pm and re open on TUESDAY
4th January at 9:00am.

GOPEL REFLECTION

We turn now to Luke for his account of Jesus' birth. What has become the popular story of Christmas - and what is represented in countless cribs - is largely derived from this. It has all the familiar features: the journey to Bethlehem, the manger, the swaddling clothes, the shepherds, the angel's message, and the angelic hymn 'Glory to God in the highest heaven.'

PARISH RENEWAL 2021

Parish renewal at Blackfriars has continued to evolve in different ways, responding to the circumstances and building on experience.

Walk in the Spirit

As a parish, we participated in the Archdiocesan Lenten Renewal Experience, *Walk in the Spirit*, which combined pre-pandemic and pandemic forms of gatherings. Before COVID-19, a typical parish Lenten program was a relatively small gathering in the parish centre. Following the livestreaming of Masses from St Christopher's Cathedral in 2020 as a result of the Canberra lockdown, *Walk in the Spirit* involved livestreaming of talks and music by an Archdiocesan team led by Archbishop Christopher Prowse to parish groups meeting face-to-face as well as to those joining from their homes. Our parish gathering this year was substantially bigger than in recent pre-pandemic years. It was great to be able to join our archdiocesan community in prayer and song while having the opportunity for small group discussion in a parish setting, as can be seen in these photos: <https://cgccatholic.org.au/walk-in-the-spirit/gallery/>.



of the experience occurred when archdiocesan prayer teams joined our parish group to pray with individual participants in Holy Rosary church for a deeper outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Alpha

With the experience of two Alphas in 2020 behind us, the parish renewal team embarked on an Alpha that extended a welcome to parishioners of Holy Cross Anglican and St Margaret's Uniting churches, which 'share' the Antill Street roundabout with Holy Rosary church. In conjunction with this adult Alpha, members of our team assisted in the concurrent running by Holy Cross of a Youth Alpha for 11-17 year olds, as well as in a Kid's Club run for younger children whose parents participated in the adult Alpha. Alpha is a (typically 11 week) series exploring life and Christianity in a friendly, open and informal environment. It's a fantastic place to meet people, build relationships, ask questions, and discover new things about our faith (see <https://www.alpha.org.au/> for



Cont...parish centre for afternoon tea, followed by an exploration of a different topic through a short film and a meeting in small groups to share and ask questions.

Our collaboration was even recognised by an Alpha-themed prize that our churches won for the strong joint attendance at an Alpha online Christmas party!

Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home

In the second half of the year, we organised a dialogue on Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato Si'* – On Care for our Common Home. Starting face-to-face in a lecture room at the Australian Catholic University, we had to transition to Zoom when Canberra's 2021 COVID lockdown started.

Again, we were fortunate to be able to welcome participants from a number of churches and parishes including Holy Cross, St Margaret's, St Brigid's and St Christopher's. For further information, see the separate report in this bulletin.

Advent Program

Our parish contributed to the development of, and participated in, the Archdiocesan Marriage Family Advent Program, with a number of parish couples sharing their experiences and perspectives on married and family life as part of a video for the program.

Like *Walk in the Spirit*, the program allowed participants to join a parish group or to participate from home. Material for the program was heavily inspired by *Amoris Laetitia* – The Joy of Love, Pope Francis's exhortation on love in the family. See <https://cgccatholic.org.au/walking-together/>.

Christmas

Once again, in the lead up to Christmas the North Canberra Nativity Festival – with nativity scenes, carols and a BBQ – was held in conjunction with Holy Cross and St Margaret's.

Which leads us to wish you a very happy, safe and holy Christmas. And we take this opportunity to wish you a peaceful New Year in which we hope you may consider taking part in our parish renewal endeavours.

We also thank Fr Mannes for his support, guidance and messages (especially during lockdown) in another challenging year.

Parish Renewal Team

Christmas Day



ENTRANCE ANTIphon



A child is born for us, and a son is given to us;
his sceptre of power rests upon his shoulder,
and his name will be called
Messenger of great counsel.

FIRST READING

First Reading: Isaiah 52:7-10

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

How beautiful on the mountains, are the feet of one
who brings good news, who heralds peace, brings
happiness, proclaims salvation, and tells Zion,
'Your God is king!'

Listen! Your watchmen raise their voices, they shout for
joy together, for they see the Lord face to face, as he
returns to Zion. Break into shouts of joy together, you
ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord is consoling his people,
redeeming Jerusalem.

The Lord bares his holy arm in the sight of all the
nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the
salvation of our God.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Responsorial Psalm: 97:1-6



Refrain: All the ends of the earth
have seen the saving power of God.

Sing a new song to the Lord
for he has worked wonders.
His right hand and his holy arm
have brought salvation.

The Lord has made known his salvation;
has shown his justice to the nations.
He has remembered his truth and love
for the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.
Shout to the Lord all the earth,
ring out your joy.

Sing psalms to the Lord with the harp,
with the sound of music.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
acclaim the King, the Lord.

Refrain: All the ends of the earth
have seen the saving power of God.

SECOND READING

Second Reading: Hebrews 1:1-6

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews

At various times in the past and in various different
ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the proph-
ets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to
us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to

SECOND READING

Cont... inherit everything and through whom he made
everything there is. He is the radiant light of God's glory
and the perfect copy of his nature, sustaining the uni-
verse by his powerful command; and now that he has
destroyed the defilement of sin, he has gone to take his
place in heaven at the right hand of divine Majesty. So
he is now as far above the angels as the title which he
has inherited is higher than their own name.

God has never said to any angel: You are my Son, to-
day I have become your father, or I will be a father to
him and he a son to me. Again, when he brings the First-
born into the world, he says: Let all the angels of God
worship him.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.



GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



Alleluia, alleluia!
A holy day has dawned upon us.
Come you nations and adore the Lord.
Today a great light has come upon the earth.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Gospel: John 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 this 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 the
only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart, who has
made him known.

COMMUNION ANTIphon

Communion Antiphon - Cf. Ps 97: 3



All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.



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"DOMINUS DIXIT AD ME FILIUS MEUS GENUI TE"

"The lord said unto me
thou art my son this day I have begotten thee"

With these words of the second psalm, the church begins the vigil mass of Christmas, at which we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ our redeemer in a stable in Bethlehem. This psalm, Psalm 2 was once a part of the coronation rite of the kings of Judah. The people of Israel, in virtue of its election, considered itself in a special way a son of God, adopted by God. Just as the king was the personification of the people, his enthronement was experienced as a solemn act of adoption by God, whereby the king was in some way taken up into the very mystery of God. At Bethlehem night, these words, which were really more an expression of hope than a present reality, took on a new and unexpected meaning. The child lying in the manger is truly God's son, truly begotten for us this day.

As we recall the fruit of the incarnation we understand that what happened in the womb of the virgin was really God calling us back to himself. In the Christmas event we behold the divine embrace in its most glorious form, in the form of Christ himself. It is in the son's taking on of a human nature that God comes down from his celestial throne to gather his people, to embrace them, to draw them to himself, into the life of the trinity. This is seen in Christ's own prophecy of his crucifixion and resurrection "when the son of man is lifted up from the earth he will draw all men to himself".

It is by the wood of the crib that would become the wood of the cross that man is able to enter heaven. In the words God the father spoke to St Catherine of Siena, Christ is made the bridge by which all who wish to be saved must cross. The cross is that bridge, yet Jesus is also a bridge, the bridge which links humanity with divinity, God side by side with man. Jesus reconciles man by becoming a man, man meets God in Christ.

Jesus then is the unique link which binds man and God forever. Even the angels cannot boast this! God became a man, yet he never became an angel. In some very real sense, man has ascended higher than the angels because of what we celebrate at Christmas time.

And so God the father spoke to St Catherine: "I also wish you to look at the bridge of my only-begotten son, and see the greatness thereof, for it reaches from heaven to earth, that is, that the earth of your humanity is joined to the greatness of the deity thereby. I say then that this bridge reaches from heaven to earth, and constitutes the union which i have made with man."

What we celebrate then is that God became born for us as man; that God bridged the gap between humanity and deity in his own person; that infinity reached its hand into finitude; that he who is omnipotent became weak, that he who could not suffer became the sacrifice for sin.

Cont...Let us rejoice then in the gift of the God-man, Jesus Christ. The gift of Christmas is that God becomes one of us, he knows our suffering, he knows our weakness, he knows our fear, he knows our sins. Christ, in being God made man, knows humanity not only in a purely intellectual way but in an experiential one, not in a remote academic way but as one who stands as a human among humans, the one who dwelt among us, who got his hands dirty, who earnt his keep by the sweat of his brow in the carpenter's workshop, who knew hunger, who knew betrayal; who knew rejection all for us.

Our psalm "dixit dominus ad me" then points us to what is happening today: "hodie filii genui te" "this day I have begotten thee". Today we rejoice because God has given us, and continues to give us, Jesus, Immanuel, God among us. Christ in giving us the holy Eucharist continues the pledge of Psalm 2 "this day I have begotten thee", each day the father begets the son, for us in the Eucharist, in the Blessed Sacrament.

May we then grasp the importance of this annual celebration? When we come to Mass to celebrate the birth of Jesus let us be mindful that Jesus Christ is given to us today, now, among us, he is present now not as the baby in the manger but as food for our journey through life, "this day I have begotten thee".

Let us give thanks to our heavenly father for Christ our lord begotten for us on Christmas day to be our bridge by which we will be able to attain heaven and reign with same father, son and Holy Spirit world without end. Amen

God love you. Fr Mannes OP



LIGHT FROM LIGHT

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

Fr Richard Finn OP

asks: How, amidst so much personal and societal darkness does the Christ Child light up our lives?

Each year in my childhood, my father would climb into the loft on Christmas Eve and retrieve a box of tree decorations. Some must have come from the early years of the twentieth century, like the little birds of painted metal that clipped onto the higher branches of the tree, and delicate glass bells; others were from the sixties like the hollow stars of coloured plastic that my mother would fill with sweets and hang lower down. There was plenty of tinsel; and a set of coloured lights to be tested, its conical bulbs tightened or replaced, in the hope that they would still work their magic but not electrocute the cat. And why? Because, as Isaiah proclaims in the first reading from the Midnight Mass of Christmas, 'on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone'; and as we hear from St John's Gospel for Christmas Day, the baby in the manger is none other than the Divine Word born in human flesh, the 'true light that enlightens all people'.

Each of us will have experienced times and pools of darkness in the past year: it may have been a major illness or family bereavement. For some it will have been the anxieties that come with financial insecurity, or sudden loss of work, or the exhausting demands of caring for others with complex needs.

Cont...Our resilience will have been tested, sometimes sorely, pushing us towards addictive behaviours or into cynicism; some will have reached breaking-point. All of us have suffered to some extent from the increasingly bitter divisions in society, from a political culture in which truth and moral integrity seem little valued. All of us, and some sharply through sudden floods, have suffered from the degradation of the natural environment on which we and future generations depend for our well-being. Now, though, we can celebrate, truthfully and joyfully, how into this darkness of sin and its consequences a light has come, 'a light that the darkness could not overpower'.

How so? How does this child light up our lives? It takes the rest of John's Gospel, takes the four Gospels, to give a proper answer to this question; even then we shall not have a full answer; but the prologue to John's Gospel sums it up for us. This child is the 'only Son of the Father full of grace and truth' and 'from His fullness we have, all of us, received'.

As the Father's Son, true God from true God, in whom there can be no shadow of falsehood, there is nothing faked or phoney. Born of Mary, this child shows us what it really is to be human, both as he lies utterly vulnerable and dependent in the manger, and as he grows up into a mature human adult. Here is someone fully alive to love in the practice of the virtues, with the courage that it takes to live in the truth and to speak it. Here is one utterly unafraid to see the creation as the Father's gift, to accept and return the Father's love for Him and us in the power of the Holy Spirit, to worship the Father in the love He shows His neighbours, be they friends or enemies. This is what it is to act justly; this is what it takes to be compassionate. And as He goes to the cross, we see what it really costs.

As the Father's son, true God from true God, between whom nothing is withheld, but all is given and shared in the Holy Spirit, there is nothing mean or stinted in how he acts. All is graced, freely given. Born of Mary, this child will share with us His all-creative life, restore us to that fully human life which He reveals, pouring out the Holy Spirit upon His Church at Pentecost, in baptism and confirmation, and through the gift of Himself in the Holy Eucharist.

If we accept His cross, we shall share His resurrection from death to eternal life. 'If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water' (Jn 7:37-38).

However dark it gets, and because it gets so dark, there is so much to celebrate in this light!

Happy Christmas! <http://english.op.org/torch>

WELCOME A FOREIGN STUDENT

The Australian National University has many students from other nations. Often they find themselves quite isolated during their studies. It is interesting and mutually enriching for foreign students and Canberra residents to meet. ANU Chaplaincy is facilitating these contacts. If you would like to welcome a foreign student or students to your home for a meal or some other occasion then please contact us under the heading: Foreign Student Hospitality on email chaplaincy@anu.edu.au. Then we will coordinate and introduce you to the student(s) who would enjoy accepting your invitation.

BRINGER OF PEACE

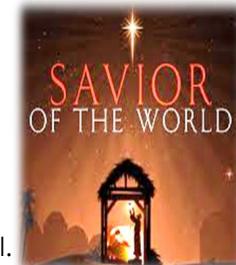
The marginal situation of Jesus' birth renders it accessible to a group particularly on the margins of society themselves. The shepherds of Bethlehem are the first of the "poor" to whom, the scriptural promises of the "good news" of the Saviour's birth is announced.

Like Mary herself, they initially take fright at the heavenly apparition. They are reassured. What they hear is a message "of great joy for all the people: the birth of a "Saviour, who is Christ the Lord". In the Greco-Roman world "saviour" was a title bestowed upon kings and rulers who brought peace and prosperity to their realms. In particular, the emperor Augustus, in whose reign Jesus was born, was acclaimed paradigm "Saviour" because his rule had brought peace – or at least the absence of war – to the entire world. Now, in the brief Gloria canticle, a multitude of the heavenly army signal the birth of a Saviour bringing peace of a different kind:

Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace
to those who enjoy God's favour.

The Gospel is not setting Jesus as Saviour over against the civil power (Rome) in a hostile sense. But by placing the birth of Jesus within this context, it claims the notions of salvation and peace for the divine project now underway. The true peace for which the world longs can only flow from the divine favour that the ministry of Jesus will proclaim.

The final phrase does not suggest, in a restrictive sense, that some will "enjoy God's favour" and others not. It expresses the divine initiative. God's favour is poured out on the entire world, but only those who have the faith to believe that God is so gracious will enjoy its benefits to the full.



FAMILY

The importance of family is highlighted this week with Christmas closely followed by the Feast of the Holy Family on Sunday, 26 December. We pray for all families at this time, but especially those who mourn loved ones, and those who are distanced from each other, either physically or mentally.

Our prayers also for those whose Christmas hopes and plans have been dashed by the most recent outbreaks of Covid-19, here in Australia and overseas.

A NOTE FROM THE PARISH PRIEST



In another year of many challenges and setbacks it's good to recall that despite all the negativity, the Christmas story gives us hope. God taking on a human nature is at the heart of our Celebration: this is good news because God is not above our torment, our sorrow, our dismay.

Rather than magically making all sorrows disappear God embraces it and transforms it into a way to transcend the purely earthly condition.

As we move on to a new year I would like to thank you all for welcoming me to the parish and I pray that your Christmas and New Year may be blessed by the babe of Nazareth.

God love you all. You're all in my prayers. Fr Mannes