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Christmas Vigil - 24 December 2023

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24 December 2023

The Nativity of the Lord (Vigil)

Reflection by Peter Black

Pastoral Note

The texts for the vigil mass need not be used at an evening Mass on 24 December – the texts for Mass During the Night (Midnight Mass) may be used.

Introduction

The Vigil mass readings bring us to reflect on the continuity of God's action across time. The passages link the faith of Israel with the birth of Christ and, in Paul, the fulfillment of all that God has promised. The emphasis is somewhat theological, but ultimately pastoral and practical: in the birth of the child, God is come amongst us.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are Redeemer and Judge. Lord have mercy.

You are the Christ. Christ have mercy.

You were born of Mary. Lord have mercy.

First Reading

Isaiah 62:1-5

Israel's exile weighs heavily but she will not always be called 'Abandoned' or 'Forsaken'. Israel will be fully redeemed because God rejoices in her as a newly wedded couple delight in their love.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 88(89):4-5, 16-17, 27, 29

For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

The psalm echoes the faith and confidence in a loving God full of forgiveness who will be faithful to the covenant.

Second Reading

Acts 13:16-17, 22-25

Paul declares in the synagogue in Antioch that Jesus is the one for whom Israel has been waiting, a descendent of David with whom God has made a covenant.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 1:1-25

Matthew gives us the genealogy of Jesus. Joseph accepts the son of Mary as his own and names him and draws him into the house of David.

Reflection

Two aspects of life which normally annoy us or make us wary can be transformed at Christmas time. The first is the experience of waiting. I seem to have a particular gift for always going into the wrong queue at a store or at an airport. At a large department store it might be that the person in front of me has some rare special gift voucher that takes an age to process, or perhaps the checkout person at a grocery store does not know what a quince, a parsnip let alone a swede is. Maybe the customer's credit card is not working. Waiting is just frustrating.

Yet the Church has a whole season of waiting, called Advent, it is supposed to be an expectant and peaceful waiting, a reflective waiting. We wait for an *adventus*, an arrival, something, someone is about to arrive in our life. We all know that waiting for a loved one not seen for some time to come through the doors at an airport is very different to waiting to pay for our groceries. In the former, someone is coming to us, someone is arriving, that someone will bring something special into our days, a person is arriving who elicits love from us. When advent waiting comes to an end we celebrate once again the love of God for us made flesh in Jesus Christ. We recall the great arrival which changed our world forever. The wait was so long, and the prophets had predicted this arrival for hundreds of years. In a strange way the waiting, if we properly prepare for the arrival, makes the event even more enjoyable. We will have no doubt that 'God is with us.' Of course, we need to wait on the Lord not just in preparation for Christmas. Prayers that seem to go unanswered, events that seem senseless, trials that threaten to break us or those we love. With patience and trust we will eventually be able to say: 'I waited on the Lord and he answered me.'

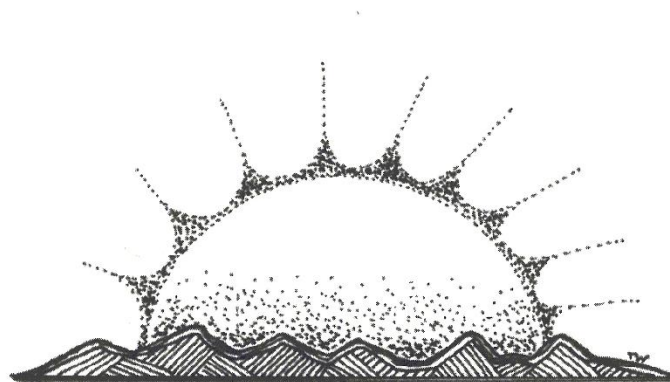
The second aspect of life transformed by Christmas is vulnerability. Usually, vulnerability is something we avoid or at least hide, after all who wants to reveal weakness, dependency, limitation, fears, and the potential to be hurt. Yet at Christmas time the vulnerability of the Christ child and indeed Mary and Joseph expresses a tender love. A tender love for each other and a tender love for us. The saints often wrote about the love of God for us, drawing especially on two aspects of Christ's life to powerfully make their point, namely his birth and this death, his crib and cross, his

vulnerability at the beginning and at the end of his life. It is often in vulnerability that we find love and express love.

Christmas is an opportunity to make ourselves a little more vulnerable in the sense of letting our guard down, through our words, our actions, our glances, and our spending time together. To clearly express such sentiments as 'I love you and appreciate you,' or 'I need you, I am grateful to you,' and 'I thank God for you.' The Son of God made himself very vulnerable to dramatically express his love for us and to offer us the gift of redemption. The reason we give gifts at Christmas is to recall the great gift of God to us, namely Jesus Christ our Saviour. The best way to celebrate this Christmas event is to follow his example, the gifts or presents we give to others are really props to help us say and express all the important sentiments we have recalled above. So, this Christmas time can be more than rushing around preparing meals, buying, and wrapping gifts and cleaning the house before visitors arrive. It needs to include a prayerful excitement that the Christ has arrived, for Christ offers us new life, peace, and joy. We can share all this with others.

A couple of years ago an old friend sent me a Christmas card. Inside the card was a quote from St Bernard. It read:

'In the first coming Christ was our redemption, in the last coming he will appear as our life, in this intermediary time he is our joy and our consolation.' Are we a source joy and consolation to those we have been given to love? Does impatience get in the way? Perhaps we cannot wait for things to be done my way, we cannot wait to be able to spend time with those who need it. Does the need to control get in the way of joy and consolation? Celebrating the birth of Christ our Redeemer reminds us that the greatest accomplishment in life is to love and to be loved. This is the real source of true joy and peace.



**A holy day has
dawned upon us.**

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

On this night Jesus, our Saviour took the form of a baby to bring us salvation and hope. Therefore, we humbly come with our needs, trusting in God's everlasting faithfulness.

Petitions

We pray for the universal Church; may she continue to shine Christ's light in the world as an offering of hope and love and strive to be an authentic beacon of grace.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for peace in the world. Christ's birth binds heaven to earth; may his coming establish harmony among all the nations so that all nations will be generous towards suffering people from places of war and famine who struggle to survive.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are homeless during this season of the celebration of Christ's love. May they be granted peace, food and comfort through the generosity of our communities during this time.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are ill, elderly and vulnerable. Grant them the care that they need through the loving hands that echo Christ's love.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our parish community that we may be renewed by our celebration of Christ's coming and therefore live in hope and faith for when Christ will come again.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who mourn for loved ones during the Christmas season. May they be wrapped in love and peace.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Father, we trust that you hear all our prayers as we celebrate the birth of your son Jesus and we know that you answer our needs through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
A child is born in Bethlehem				612		
Angels we have heard on high		140		622	255	286
Away in a manger					256	289
Baby lying in a manger			63		257	
Good Christians all, rejoice				697	261	
Hark! The herald angels sing	171			704	262	294
Joy to the world	170			728	265	295
O come, all ye faithful (Verses 1-2)	167			760	267	287
O little town of Bethlehem				772	266	296
Of the Father's love begotten				779	268	
Once in royal David's city				782	269	297
Sing we, sing we Nowell		124			271	
The first Nowell	169			822	280	298
Unto us a boy is born				849	273	
What child is this? (Verses 1-2)	165				275	

Title	AOVNG	S&S2
Born this day		296
Emmanuel	40	
Let the season shine	87	

Psalms selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 88: *For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.*

	CWB	GA	JOBB	LPSF	PM2
Psalm 88	385	50	pg. 14	pg. 6	pg. 87

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Glory to God (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Recessional]

Glory, gloria (STAR) [CHILDREN, Gathering, Recessional]

There is a child (TT/SYJ) *based on Is 9:1-7*

This little boy (TT/SYJ) [Non-Scriptural Reflection - Gifts]