

CHRISTMAS The Nativity of the Lord

We gather to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. The feast of Christmas celebrates the coming of God into our world in the person of Jesus, so that we might better understand who God really is. This feast reminds us that Jesus is a true human being, born of a human mother.



Isaiah 9:1-7

The prophet promises that the child soon to be born will bring peace to a people weary of war and conflict.

Titus 2:11-14

The writer looks forward to the second coming of Christ in glory.

Luke 2:1-14

Luke tells us about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and how the news was first revealed to people on the margins of society, namely, shepherds.

Isaiah 52:7-10

The Good News of God's salvation is not meant for any one particular group, but for all people.

Hebrews 1:1-6

God's word reaches its climax and fulfilment in the person of God's Son, Jesus the Christ.

John 1:1-18

The Fourth Gospel presents a vision of Jesus as God's Word, in human flesh - the mystery of the incarnation.

John's Gospel begins with a mystical hymn to Christ. John takes us back to the "beginning" (Gn 1:1), to the pre-existent Christ, the eternal Word (Greek, Logos). The Word of God had been expressed

in the creation of the universe,
in divine wisdom,
in the law revealed on Sinai, and
in the word spoken through the prophets.

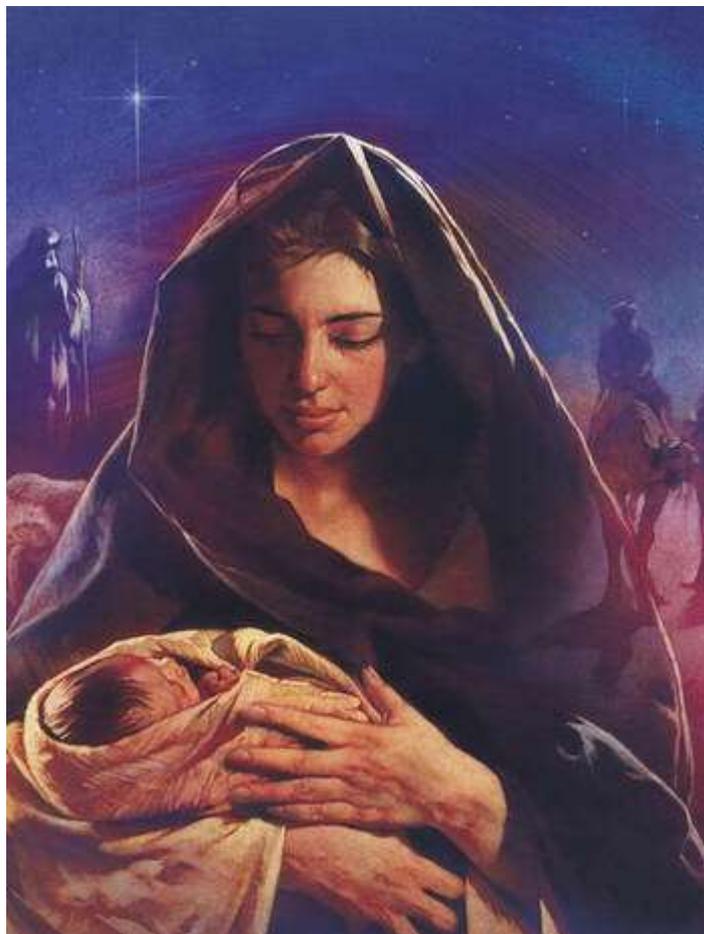
Now God's Word was manifested in the Incarnation of Christ. In his flesh, Jesus embodied and revealed God's Word;

He was divine wisdom personified. Through Christ's creative word all things were brought to life (Jn 1:3).

He was the great liberator, like Moses, who set men and women free from the restraints of sin (8:32).

He was the divine "light" that cast out darkness by the light of truth (12:46).

John the Baptist was the herald of God's Word. He came to testify to its truth so that everyone who believed in Christ might find life through him. Jesus came into our world so that we can come into his world.



Reflection

It can come as a bit of a surprise to learn that for the first three centuries of Christianity the Church did not celebrate Christmas. The main feast was Easter.

The first celebration of Christmas began in Jerusalem. They began celebrating the holy places that were connected with the life of Jesus.

It was in Rome that the celebration of Christmas then arrived from Bethlehem. Nobody knew the actual date of Jesus' birth, but they looked at Matthew's Gospel and worked out that it was at the time of King Herod the Great. But what month was he born in? Actually, it probably wasn't December because Luke says that the shepherds were out in the fields keeping night-watch over their sheep (Lk 2:8). Palestinian shepherds didn't actually do this in winter time.

The date chosen to celebrate Christmas (25 December) was more to do with the winter solstice. The pagan Romans celebrated Saturnalia, a two-week feast of the birth of Sol Invictus ("The Unconquerable Sun"). This was in December around the shortest day.

The early Christians were good at 'canonising' pagan Roman feasts, and they took this one over and sanctified it as the festival of the birth of the Son of God.

Our word, "Christmas", came from the Old English 'Christes Masse', which means "Christ's Mass." The first recorded use of Christes Masse dates from 1038 AD.

The commercial (non-Christian) celebration of Christmas seems to begin earlier and earlier each year. This year I think I saw my first Christmas advertisement in September! I'm sure a lot of this is to do with businesses trying to survive in a fragile economy exacerbated by Coronavirus. The funny thing is that however early it starts, the commercial Christmas stops suddenly at the close of business on Christmas Eve.



The Catholic liturgical Season of Christmas begins on Christmas Eve with the Night Mass and continues until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The liturgical colour for Christmas is white.

The Season of Christmas contains a number of big feasts:

The **Feast of the Nativity of the Lord** – the Birth of Jesus, God’s Son,
the **Feast of the Holy Family**, Jesus grew and matured as part of a human family

the **Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord** - Jesus’ revealed to the Gentiles
(non-Jews).

the **Feast of the Baptism of the Lord**, the beginning of his mission.

This year’s Gospel, Mark, hasn’t got an Infancy Narrative, so at Mass the liturgy draws on the other three Gospels for the readings. At Christmas Mass we’ve got Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus and of his revelation to the Bethlehem shepherds; then Luke’s account of the visit of these same shepherds to Jesus; followed by the solemn and majestic introduction to the Gospel of John: the birth of Jesus the eternal and pre-existent Word of God. On the Feast of the Holy Family, we re-read Luke.

For the Solemnity of the Epiphany, the liturgy turns to Matthew: he’s the only Gospel-writer who tells us about the visit of the Magi to Jesus at Bethlehem.

Finally, for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord we return to Mark for his simple but refreshingly direct account of the baptism of Jesus.

The ancient world thought that if God did come into this world, he would come as a king into some great royal palace with all the might and majesty that the world calls greatness.

George Macdonald wrote in a poem called "That Holy Thing":

**They were all looking for a king
To slay their foes and lift them high;
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing,
That made a woman cry.**

God entered into an ordinary home & into an ordinary family.

Another poet, Francis Thompson' wrote beautifully 'Ex Ore Infantum' ('Out of the mouths of Babes'):

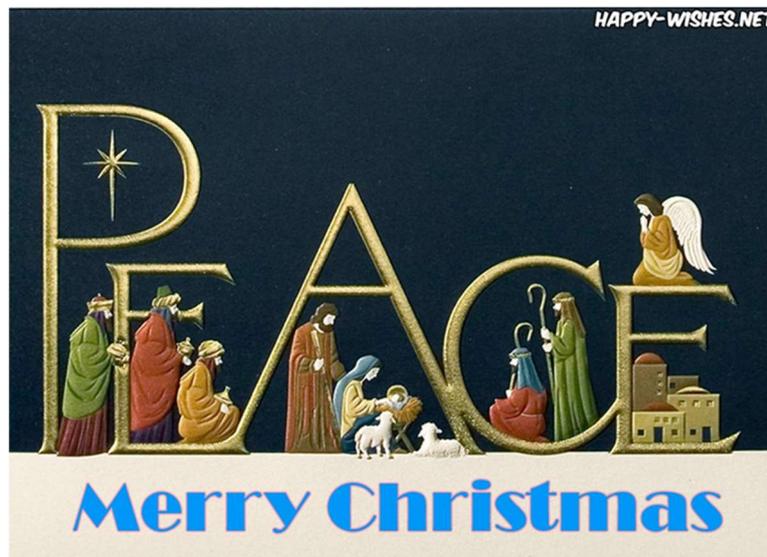
**Little Jesus, wast thou shy
Once, and just so small as I?
And what did it feel to be
Out of Heaven
and just like me?**

WORDSEARCH

A	B	Y	M	E	L	C	H	I	O	R	R	E	CHRISTMAS TREE	ADVENT
B	D	E	L	B	A	T	S	L	A	A	E	S	DECORATIONS	CAROLS
S	I	V	D	L	E	O	N	Z	T	R	H	N	HOLLY	ANGEL
A	S	R	E	J	O	S	A	S	T	E	R	E	REINDEER	CRIB
N	G	G	C	N	O	H	O	S	P	E	T	C	TINSEL	HOLY
T	N	Y	O	M	T	S	A	H	G	I	J	N	MANGER	NOEL
A	I	B	R	L	Y	M	E	N	T	E	R	I	BABY	MARY
C	K	A	A	S	T	R	A	P	S	A	C	K	JOSEPH	BALTHAZAR
L	A	B	T	S	D	M	R	U	H	T	O	N	JESUS	MELCHIOR
A	B	R	I	G	H	O	S	H	O	L	Y	A	SHEPHERD	CASPAR
U	M	R	O	O	R	E	E	D	N	I	E	R	KINGS	GOLD
S	H	E	N	L	E	S	N	I	T	A	R	F	STAR	FRANKINCENSE
C	R	I	S	D	S	Y	R	A	M	I	N	G	STABLE	MYRRH
													SANTA CLAUS	



TODAY A SAVIOUR HAS BEEN BORN TO YOU.



A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A PRAYER THAT
2021 WILL BE BETTER FOR US ALL

