



Encountering Christ
Prayerfully preparing for the
Sunday Mass and praying in
particular for our school families



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 1st January 2023 - Feast of Mary, Mother of God

1 Relax & Remember

Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

Taken from the Gospel for Sunday 1st January 2023 (Luke 2:16-21): The Child in the Cattle-Trough

The shepherds hurried away to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; it was exactly as they had been told. When the eighth day came and the child was to be circumcised, they gave him the name Jesus, the name the angel had given him before his conception.

3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

The cosy picture of the bright-eyed child in the clean wooden manger (with the ox and the ass peeping in from a respectful distance) is misleading. The picture should be one of destitution. There was no room for the new-born in the normal living-quarters, and the worried mother had to lodge him in the only space available, a feeding-trough for cattle, perched on top of their fodder. That was where the ragged sheep-minders found him. They too were the poorest of the poor, no sheep of their own, just hired for the night. Perhaps they got a drink of goats'-milk or a crust of bread for their shivering pains. Matthew does at least have the baby worshipped by those rather splendid Wise Men from the East, with their noble and symbolic gifts. No gifts forthcoming from today's rough crew. As we worry about our post-Christmas waistlines, it makes us reflect on where true blessedness lies, and who are the chosen ones of the Lord. Surely God could have rustled up more suitable worshippers for his Incarnate Son than these scruffy down-and-outs? No, I'm afraid not.

Why is the poverty of Mary and Jesus so strongly stressed?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



**The Wednesday Word is under the patronage of St Joseph, Patron Saint of Families and Protector of the Church
Within the tradition of the Catholic Church, each Wednesday is dedicated to St Joseph**

WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 1st January 2023



First Reading: *The Blessing of God*

Numbers 6:22-27

The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'Say this to Aaron and his sons: "This is how you are to bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace." This is how they are to call down my name on the sons of Israel, and I will bless them.'

In its original setting in the Bible this passage comes at the end of a series of laws. It invokes the blessing of God on his people. The triple repetition makes it a strong and insistent blessing, calling the presence and protection of God on his people. At a certain stage, in the 1960s, there was a great tendency to translate the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) as 'happy are the poor in spirit,' etc. But God's blessing does not mean 'happiness' in the sense that the poor in spirit are singing and dancing, having fun. Rather, it means that God's protective hand is over them: nothing can go wrong, and God's guidance is looking after them, despite any appearances to the contrary. So, when the passage is read on this day, it does not mean that Mary and her Son were always merry and having fun. Mary had the same troubles as any mother with a new baby. It does not mean that the baby Jesus never cried. Rather, God's protective hand was upon them in all their doings, their relationships and their troubles. For us, today, it means that this presence of the Lord was the beginning and guarantee of salvation.

What is the difference between being happy and being blessed?

Second Reading: *Mother of God*

Galatians 4:4-7

When the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law and to enable us to be adopted as sons. The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, 'Abba, Father', and it is this that makes you a son; you are not a slave any more; and if God has made you son, then he has made you heir.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul is not setting out to assert anything about the maternity of Mary. He is simply setting out to assert that we are no longer subject to the Law. Why not? Because Jesus, though a real man like ourselves, could call God his Father. As son and heir of God, Jesus is free of all restrictions and enslavements, and we too, plunged into Christ in baptism, are also the heirs of God and so are free. All this depends on Jesus fully sharing our human nature. Paul just slips this in unquestioningly, 'born of a woman'. Where did he get his human existence from, if not from Mary? At the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD Nestorius wanted Mary to be called 'Christotokos' or 'Christ-bearer', but the Council insisted that the man Jesus, who was fully God, derived his whole being from Mary: she was 'Theotokos', 'God-bearer'. The whole person who was God was born of Mary, not just a human Christ. From Mary he derived his genes, his DNA, his flesh-and-blood, his habits of mind, his warmth of personality. He was utterly, frankly and joyfully human, and yet those who opened their eyes and ears to him could not forebear reverencing him as only God may be revered.

How much would Jesus have looked like his mother and had her characteristics?

“ Jesus was utterly, frankly and joyfully human. ”

The Wednesday Word: *Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God*
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