



Encountering Christ Praying with Sunday's Gospel

2 Read

The Gospel for Sunday 24th December 2023
The Annunciation

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,' the angel answered, 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your cousin Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

Taken from Luke 1: 26-38. The Fourth Sunday in Advent, Year B

3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering the Gospel, continue by reading this reflection.

As we prepare for the birth of Jesus, the final Sunday of Advent always focuses on Mary. What was the young girl Mary doing when the message came? Kneeling in prayer? Feeding the sheep? Fetching water? Sweeping the mud floor? What was she thinking? Engaged to be married, surely about her approaching wedding to Joseph and about the children she would mother. Then came the message which she could accept or refuse, the message on which hung the future of the world: her child would be different from all others. How 'different'? Her thoughts were turned back to the promise to David. It had been read to her so often in the Bible, and now the words echoed in her mind as she listened to the angel say, 'His reign will have no end'. This would all be the work of the Spirit which she had so often heard about in Isaiah: 'the Holy Spirit will come upon you', the Spirit which was to come upon the Servant of the Lord, the Spirit of Emmanuel, 'God with us'. Her young body was to grow, nourish and develop this child. Then she would have the child in her arms to cherish and shape as both Son of God and her own son.

What sort of person was Mary? Would you have liked to get to know her? What is God's plan for you?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

1 Relax

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.



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. Thank God for any insight you may have received.

Then ask God to bless you with a spiritual gift to help you act on any resolution you have made. Perhaps: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, joy or something else.

5 Remember

After praying for your loved ones, please remember to pray for the Church and particularly for the families connected to our schools. You may want to conclude this special weekly time with a simple prayer such as: St Joseph, Patron Saint of Families and Protector of the Church, pray for us. Mary, Star of Evangelisation, pray for us. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The Wednesday Word is under the patronage of St Joseph.

Within the tradition of the Catholic Church, each Wednesday is dedicated to St Joseph
wednesdayword.org



Art:
Bee
Still
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WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 24th December 2023



1

1st Reading: *2 Samuel 7:1-5. 8-12. 14. 16.*

A King for Ever

Once David had settled into his house and the Lord had given him rest from all the enemies surrounding him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'Look, I am living in a house of cedar while the ark of God dwells in a tent.' Nathan said to the king, 'Go and do all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with you.' But that very night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: 'Go and tell my servant David, "Thus the Lord speaks: Are you the man to build me a house to dwell in? I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be leader of my people Israel; I have been with you on all your expeditions; I have cut off all your enemies before you. I will give you fame as great as the fame of the greatest on earth. I will provide a place for my people Israel; I will plant them there and they shall dwell in that place and never be disturbed again; nor shall the wicked continue to oppress them as they did, in the days when I appointed judges over my people Israel; I will give them rest from all their enemies. The Lord will make you great; the Lord will make you a House. And when your days are ended and you are laid to rest with your ancestors, I will preserve the offspring of your body after you and make his sovereignty secure. I will be a father to him and he a son to me. Your House and your sovereignty will always stand secure before me and your throne be established forever."

At the height of his powers King David wants to thank God for his lavish favours by building him a house. No human being patronises God, and David was not allowed to build the Temple. But God replies with the promise that he will build David a House. In one sense David's House crashed into ruins when the last king of Judah was blinded and taken off into exile in Babylon. But the promise of an eternal kingship still stands. It is fulfilled in the eternal kingship of the Son of David who is also Mary's Son, and this fulfilment begins at the Annunciation. This is why so many phrases from the prophet Nathan's promise are echoed in the annunciation of the angel to Mary. 'Your sovereignty will always stand secure before me and your throne be established for ever', says Nathan. 'He will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end', says the angel.

What is the "House" that God promises to build for David?

2

2nd Reading: *Romans 16:25-27*

The Last Secret

Glory to him who is able to give you the strength to live according to the Good News I preach, and in which I proclaim Jesus Christ, the revelation of a mystery kept secret for endless ages, but now so clear that it must be broadcast to pagans everywhere to bring them to the obedience of faith. This is only what scripture has predicted, and it is all part of the way the eternal God wants things to be. He alone is wisdom; give glory therefore to him through Jesus Christ forever and ever. Amen.

This reading gives the final cry of excitement and triumph at the end of Paul's great letter to the Christians of Rome. His task is to reveal to the nations (not just to the Jews) God's secret plan, which has been brewing all through human history and now comes to its climax in Christ. God has offered his friendship and his divine wisdom in Christ. Human beings respond with the obedience of 'faith', a keyword of the letter: we need only trust God's promises for all our weakness to be buried under God's glory. Ultimately, all we need do in this 'obedience of faith' is simply hang on by our finger-tips, accepting God's promised help. Our celebration of Christmas is not just of a baby born at Bethlehem. It is of the climax of God's plan for the world, the keystone of history. So we do not merely look back on it as a great event. Christians must see it as the anchor of God's design for the whole of history and for the course of each day.

What is God's plan for the world? What is his plan for me - in my life and on this day?

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

PARISH VERSION: Prayerfully preparing for Sunday Mass with special prayers for our school families