

Christmas Day Mass Readings

Isaiah 52:7-10 ·

Rejoice, for the Lord is consoling his people

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.

Psalm 97(98):1-6

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

Sing a new song to the Lord for he has worked wonders.

His right hand and his holy arm have brought salvation.

R.

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.

R.

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

Shout to the Lord, all the earth, ring out your joy.

R.

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.

R.

Hebrews 1:1-6 · *God has spoken to us through his Son*

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

Alleluia, alleluia! A hallowed day has dawned upon us. Come, you nations, worship the Lord, for today a great light has shone down upon the earth. Alleluia!

John 1:1-18

The Word was made flesh, and lived among us

In the beginning was the Word: and 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 his 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.

The Story of the Christmas Crib By Fr. Alfred McBride, O. Praem.

On this most touching of Christian feasts, let us hear again the story of one of our popular customs—the Christmas Crib.

In the last year of his life, Francis of Assisi told his friends, “This will be my final Christmas. I want to celebrate it in a new way.” Francis had a friend in the lovely mountain town of Greccio. His friend owned some land on a hillside opposite the town. Several grotto-like caves lined the hilly property. His friend gave him and his brothers the land to use as a hermitage.

Francis and a few of his disciples moved there at the beginning of advent. Francis confided to his friend that he would like one cave to be transformed into a Bethlehem scene. His friend lined the cave with straw. He installed a manger filled with straw and brought in an ox and a donkey.

On the side he placed a small altar for Mass.

About an hour before midnight, the people of the village of Greccio came in procession to celebrate Christmas with Francis. Their stream of lanterns and candles looked like stars coming across the valley. As they sang the laude, the ancient Christmas carols of Umbria, they seemed to echo the Gloria of the angels in Luke’s Gospel.

When they arrived at the cave, they were charmed by the sight of the ox and donkey and manger. And none more delighted than their children. The Eucharistic celebration began. At homily time, Francis stood by the manger to talk about the birth of Jesus. A spell of religious awe overtook the listeners. One account says that at the end of the homily, a gold light filled their assembly.

They saw Francis reach into the empty manger and lift out a baby and cradle him in his arms.

And then he held the baby out to them, saying: “My brothers and sisters, behold the Saviour of the world.” And all of them were joined as one in the mystery of the Incarnation.

After the Eucharist, Francis disappeared. Not until dawn, when the morning star hovered in the sky, did someone find him. He was absorbed in prayer, his face turned toward Bethlehem.

And that is how our custom of having a Christmas crib began. Through the centuries, Christians have found a thousand ways to create their own version of the crib. By bringing to life the Christmas scene, millions of believers have been put in touch with this profound mystery of God’s love for us. What does Francis teach us by his Vision of the Crib?

See the simplicity of God’s mystery. Our education makes us look at the complicated side of life. Our culture prizes the complexity of a scientific world. The result is we approach God as such a confusing reality that we fail to see the simplicity of his love. Francis brings us a birth room and a child on a hillside. He tells us that God has the simplicity of this child.

Observe how God comes amid the poor. Since God is the greatest there is, it seems to us he should be found in the palaces of the mighty. Francis builds his crib scene on a road near a poor village. God is always to be found among the poor, the needy, the suffering.

See how human God can be. What is more captivating than a few hundred families singing carols at midnight beneath a starry sky in the hills of Umbria? What is more soul satisfying than cradling a baby with love in the mountain air? What better way could God have chosen to show how much he thinks of us? What better method could Francis have picked to communicate how caring God is?

As we gather by the altar and the Crib, let us say Gloria and thanks to the Holy Child who brings us such joy... And another thanks to Francis for the glorious idea of a crib.

PRAYER: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God. Glory to you on this feast of your birth in Bethlehem. We are grateful for the simplicity of your mystery. We are ennobled by your choice to come into the world as a human being. We are inspired to search for you among the poor and the humble and to be humble and poor in our own way. We rejoice in your birth and seek to live better lives as a result. Amen