

## Closing Prayer

We praise you, gracious God,  
for the glad tidings of peace,  
the good news of salvation:  
your Word became flesh,  
and we have seen his glory.

Let the radiance of that glory  
enlighten the lives  
of those who celebrate his birth.

Reveal to all the world  
the light no darkness can extinguish,  
our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
in the splendour of eternal light,  
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers · Christmas, Mass during the day<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

## Christmas

*25 December*

### Principal Service readings

#### Set II

Isaiah 62.6-end

Psalm 97

Titus 3.4-7

Luke 2.[1-7] 8-20

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *The birth of Jesus, and the revelation to the shepherds*

[<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.]

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

<sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2.[1-7] 8-20 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

## Comments and Questions

Luke 2 stands independently of Luke 1, leading to some scholars to suggest that the material itself was originally independent. (It is a similar pattern to Matthew 1 and 2).

After describing the historical setting Luke deals with the birth quite briefly. The census is used to explain how Mary and Joseph, who lived in Nazareth ended up in Bethlehem. The edict from Caesar Augustus gives the birth of Jesus a solemn setting. It would also evoke for Luke’s readers ideas of rebellion and the zealot movement (A.D. 6-7), and of the ultranationalist movement which provoked the Romans to destroy Jerusalem, including the temple (A.D. 70).

The centre of the narrative is the proclamation to the shepherds and their response. Luke mentions the manger, an animal feeding trough twice (2.7, 12). Is the manger a sign of poverty or does it refer to God’s complaint against Israel in Isaiah 1.3: ‘The ox knows its owner and the donkey knows the manger of its lord; but Israel has not known me, and my people have not understood me’? When the shepherds find the manger they do begin to understand.

In the Old testament the ‘city of David’ is Jerusalem. Luke transfers the designation to Bethlehem. The proclamation to the shepherds (2.10-11) echoes in its style the imperial propaganda of Augustus. The second

<sup>1</sup> New Revised Standard Version Bible is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

angelic proclamation is different: it is a hymn of praise – ‘Glory in the highest heavens ...’ (2.13-14). It is one of four that Luke includes in his gospel (the others being the Magnificat, the Benedictus, and the Nunc Dimittis).

The birth scene closes with the reactions of the three different groups: (1) the shepherds who come and verify the angelic sign, symbolising an Israel who at last recognises the Lord; (2) a group of hearers who are astonished at what the shepherds report (2.18); (3) Mary, who treasures and ponders their words in her heart (2.19).

## Quotations

### 1

Peace on earth will come to stay,  
When we live Christmas every day.

Helen Steiner Rice, 1900–1981

### 2

God is here. This truth should fill our lives, and every Christmas should be for us a new and special meeting with God, when we allow his light and grace to enter deep into our soul.

*Christ is passing by* / Josemaría Escrivá. 1902–1975

### 3

“But there was no room at the inn”; the inn is the gathering place of public opinion; so often public opinion locks its doors to the King.

Fulton J. Sheen. 1895–1979

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Incarnation; christology; manifestation; salvation