

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

The shepherds went in haste,
and found Mary and Joseph and the infant
lying in a manger.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

O God, who were pleased to give us
the shining example of the Holy Family,
graciously grant that we may imitate them
in practising the virtues of family life and in
the bonds of charity,
and so, in the joy of your house,
delight one day in eternal rewards.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3

A reading from the book of Genesis.

The word of the Lord was spoken to Abram in a vision, "Have no fear, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great."

"My Lord," Abram replied "what do you intend to give me? I go childless..." Then Abram said, "See, you have given me no descendants; some man of my household will be my heir." And then this word of the Lord was spoken to him, "He shall not be your heir; your heir shall be one of your own flesh and blood." Then taking him outside he said, "Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can. Such will be your descendants" he told him. Abram put his faith in the Lord, who counted this as making him justified.

The Lord dealt kindly with Sarah as he had said, and did what he had promised her. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the time God had promised. Abraham named the son born to him Isaac, the son to whom Sarah had given birth.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 104

Response:

He, the Lord, is our God.

He remembers his covenant for ever.

1. Give thanks to the Lord, tell his name,
make known his deeds among the
peoples.

O sing to him, sing his praise;
tell all his wonderful works! (R.)

2. Be proud of his holy name,
let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice.
Consider the Lord and his strength;
constantly seek his face. (R.)

3. Remember the wonders he has done,
his miracles, the judgements he spoke.
O children of Abraham, his servant,
O sons of the Jacob he chose. (R.)

4. He remembers his covenant for ever,
his promise for a thousand generations,
the covenant he made with Abraham,
the oath he swore to Isaac. (R.)

SECOND READING Hebrews 11:8,11-12,17-19

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise would be faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who was already as good as dead himself, more descendants than could be counted, as many as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though the promises had been made to him and he had been told: It is through Isaac that your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

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.

Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Luke 2:22-40

(For shorter form, read between ><)

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke.

>When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord< – observing what stands written in the law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord – and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

"Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace,

just as you promised;

because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see,

a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel."

As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected – and

a sword will pierce your own soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare."

There was a prophetess also, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

>When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

The Gospel of the Lord.<

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;

through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,

he suffered death and was buried,

and rose again on the third day

in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory

to judge the living and the dead

and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,

the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

who with the Father and the Son is adored and
glorified,

who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins

and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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THE WORD

A VISIT TO THE TEMPLE

(LUKE 2:22-40)



The atmosphere of Luke's two chapters about the circumstances of Jesus' birth is very much that of the world of the Hebrew scriptures.

The evangelist emphasises that the Messiah grew up in a family and social setting steeped in the traditions of Israel. His "parents" and the elderly couple in today's Gospel episode represent all that is best in the people, those who are open to the Spirit and to the word of God. Luke mentions five times "the Law of the Lord" which underlines their fidelity to the practice of their religion. The scene takes place at the very heart of Israel's religious focus, the Temple in Jerusalem.

Simeon is a prophet who indicates in his song that the mission of Jesus will provoke different reactions: those who encounter Jesus will have to decide whether to accept him and his message or not. Mary represents the people of Israel, and the sword which will pierce her soul represents the act of judgement or discernment which will accompany this encounter: it is the blade which will penetrate the deepest part of the person to see what she or he is made of, to discover the decision they have come to about Jesus and his message. It is out of those who welcome Jesus, like Simeon and Anna, that the new people of God will be composed.

Luke notes that the family returns to Nazareth and that the child grew up like any other, so the Son of God was a true human being. ■

REFLECT

Luke's infancy narrative has been called "the Gospel in miniature": all the main themes which will appear in the story of Jesus and his ministry are stated here and developed later. One motif which emerges from today's readings is the division which Jesus will cause among his hearers. Not everyone by any means will react in a positive way and their hostility will lead to his death on the cross. Each person will have to decide whether to accept Jesus or not. Those who welcome him will form the new people of God.

No one in the Gospel story is a disciple in isolation: even Peter is one of the circle of disciples. Although each disciple has a personal relationship with Jesus the Master, we are all members of a wider group, which we call the Church. Luke emphasises that the righteous characters in the story of Jesus are faithful members of Israel, deeply attached and devoted to the traditions of their people. The purpose of such practices is to bring them close to God and to deepen their commitment. We might remember that the definition of the Church today is "the people of God". The purpose of our celebrating the Eucharist together is not just to celebrate our faith (or simply to fulfil an obligation) but also to give support to our fellow parishioners. If someone is struggling, it can be an immense help and encouragement to see others turning up every week. ■

SAY

Mine eyes have seen
the glory of the
coming of the Lord.
(Traditional song)

LEARN

The name Jesus (and its Hebrew form *Joshua*) means "the Lord saves".

Luke often pairs a male and female character in his writing, for example Simeon and Anna.

The sword which will pierce Mary's soul is the sword of judgement, not of sorrow.

DO

Look around at the other people at the Eucharist: consider how your presence can be a support to someone who is struggling – and they to you.

