

Solemnity of Christmas (Dawn) December 25th

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

Introduction

This Mass is sometimes called the "Shepherd's Mass". In ancient times, pilgrims to Bethlehem celebrated Midnight Mass at the site of the Nativity, at the Church built over the cave where Jesus was born. They then returned to Jerusalem. They arrived at dawn and celebrated another Mass at the Church of St. Anastasia (In Greek, "Anastasia" means "resurrection"). The dawn reminded them of the resurrection as well as the dawning of the Son of God. Our Responsorial Psalm refrain is "A light will shine on us this day; the Lord is born for us." Christ's light comes to us ("appears") through baptism (second reading). We need to ponder the glorious message, as Mary did after the shepherds left.

1st Reading - Isaiah 62:11-12

As in the Christmas Vigil 1st reading, Isaiah looks forward to God breaking the silence of many years. In this reading, we hear the anticipated joy when this event occurs.

¹¹ See, the LORD proclaims to the ends of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, your savior comes!

Zion is another name for Jerusalem. Recall that the city is built on two mountains with the temple being on Mount Moriah.

Here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. ¹² They shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of the LORD, And you shall be called "Frequented," a city that is not forsaken.

Some translations say "sought out" or "sought after" rather than "frequented".

These lines have caught the spirit of the Feast of Tabernacles and especially the joy of the glorious procession on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. On the first night the temple area was brightly illuminated by lamps and torches. Men of piety and good deeds used to dance before the procession which brought the lamps/torches; singing songs and praises.

2nd Reading - Titus 3:4-7

Saint Paul wrote this letter to Titus, Bishop of Crete, around the year 66 while he was in Macedonia. It contains a series of rules and recommendations for the good government of the young community, whose members mostly were of a gentile background. In our reading today we hear of the change in humanity brought about by the coming of Christ. Before His coming, all humanity,

both Jews and Gentiles, was in a deplorable state. Now, there is a hope for the Christian.

Beloved: ⁴ [W]hen the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, ⁵

Christ came as God the Father's instrument.

not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

The sacrament of baptism brings about a new life, a regeneration through water and the Holy Spirit. (Romans 6:3-4)

⁶ whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, ⁷ so that we might be justified by his grace

For Paul, the process of justification begins in God, who is upright, and who justifies the sinner as a result of what Jesus has done for humanity. Jesus' perfect sacrifice for all humanity has opened heaven and allows us to stand before God to be judged on our merits.

and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Inheritors of the Kingdom of God (Romans 8:16-17).

Gospel - Luke 2:15-20

The birth narrative we hear in this Gospel reading is unique to Luke. The shepherds and angels are not mentioned in the Gospel according to Matthew; and Mark and John have no infancy narrative at all. It is believed that Luke uses the shepherds to emphasize Jesus' relationship as a son of David; the king who had been a shepherd. There is also no doubt a contrast intended between the shepherds (the poor, ignorant and ritually unclean), and the leaders of Jerusalem.

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them to heaven,

The angels had appeared with the one angel who had announced the birth of Jesus (verses 9-13) these angels sang "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth and good will toward men".

the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went in haste

There is no hesitation; the shepherds respond immediately to the good news. The Greek which is translated here as "thing" can also be translated as "word" (see John 1:1).

and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child.

The infant in the manger is the sign which the angel had told them to look for in verse 12. This sign doesn't merely attest to the truthfulness of the angel's message, it bears out and exemplifies the message that Jesus is Savior (verse 11) "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

¹⁸ All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds.

The shepherds told others, Mary and Joseph included, about the good news they had seen and heard.

¹⁹ And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

Mary did not possess full and complete knowledge about this event and its impact upon mankind. She is the model believer because she seeks to understand while being obedient to God.

²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.