

The Nativity Proclaims God's Daily Presence

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This year, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* turns fifty-five. Each year since 1965, people have watched Linus comfort a forlorn Charlie Brown with the biblical story of the nativity of Jesus. During this animated film, based on the *Peanuts* comic strip by Charles M. Schulz, Linus tells of the angels announcing the messiah's birth, ending with "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

The biblical story in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* is from the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke. This Scripture passage brings the comfort that God's promises have been fulfilled and the joy of a newborn baby. Many of us will hear that reading during Christmas Mass. The familiarity of the passage, however, can keep us from exploring the incarnation. To go deeper into the meaning of Christ coming to us, it helps to look at more of the texts of our Christmas liturgies.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHONS

A similar thread runs through the entrance antiphons for the Masses for the Nativity of Our Lord: "Today you will know that the Lord will come, and he will save us" (at the Vigil Mass); "The Lord said to me . . . it is I who have begotten you this day" (at the Mass during the Night); "Today a light will shine upon us, for the Lord is born for us" (at the Mass at Dawn); and "A child is born for us" (at the Mass during the Day).

These texts emphasize the importance of what is occurring now. Though the birth of Christ was long ago, these antiphons remind us that the incarnation is an event that is taking place today, in our midst. The antiphons tell us that the comfort and joy first proclaimed to the shepherds is ever new and available in every moment of every day.

READINGS FROM MATTHEW AND JOHN

Passages of the nativity of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke are proclaimed at Christmas Masses during the night and at

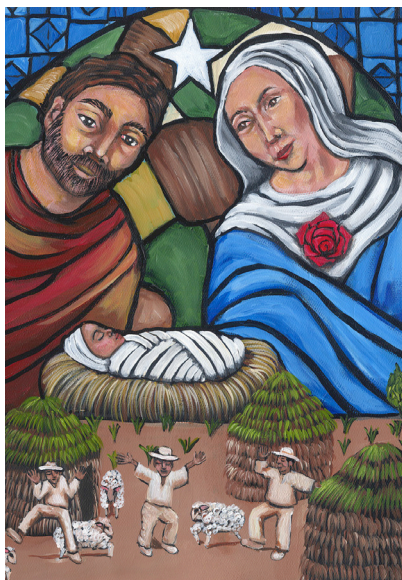
dawn, but there are two other Gospels chosen for Christmas that are worth further exploration.

At the Vigil Mass, the genealogy of Jesus according to Matthew is proclaimed. Matthew, writing to a Jewish community,

stresses that Jesus was the intended messiah and the legal heir of the throne of David, Joseph's ancestor. According to Jewish belief, the messiah had to be a descendant of both Abraham and David. But not everyone in the lineage were kings or patriarchs. Many are unknowns, and perhaps that's Matthew's point. God not only remembers the faceless and the forgotten; God includes them in his saving plan. It is also interesting to note that the people on Jesus' family tree were far from perfect. David, for example, committed adultery, murder, and theft. Solomon, David's son, had a harem of 700 wives and 300 concubines. The women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy committed incest, betrayal, and prostitution, yet all of them prepared the way for the birth of Christ. Matthew reveals that God uses the most unlikely characters to give birth to a divine purpose. God isn't concerned with who deserves God's love, only with who

needs it. This genealogy teaches us that God chose to be born into a family that was human, not perfect. The text reminds us that we, too, are part of the family of God among whom God is bringing something divine to birth.

On Christmas Day, from the first chapter of John, we hear: "And the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." This Gospel offers the fullest meaning of what we celebrate at Christmas. It reminds us that Christmas is not only about the celebration of the birth of the baby Jesus two thousand years ago, but rather that God chose to and still chooses to become one of us. Nearly a year after first experiencing the effects of a pandemic, these texts bring reassurance that God is with us.



The texts of the Mass on Christmas tell us that the Christ is alive and still chooses to be close to us today.