

WEEK 4

SUNDAY

The first and second readings are of the current day, and are found under the respective dates.

YEAR A

Gospel. Mt. 1: 18 – 24

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.

Third Reading. Hom. 5 vigil of Christmas.

Profound and great mystery.

A reading from the “Homilies” of St. Bede the Venerable, presbyter.

The evangelist Matthew describes in a few words but with complete truth the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who, eternal Son of God before all ages, appeared in time as the son of man, descending from the generations of the fathers from Abraham to Joseph, the husband of Mary. It was suitable under all aspects that God, wanting to become man out of love for men, was not born if not from a virgin; because it could not happen that a virgin could give birth to anyone other than to the Son of God.

“Behold, the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son who will be called Emmanuel, which means God with us (Is. 7: 14).

The name with which the prophet called the Saviour “God with us” signifies the two natures of Christ in the unique Person of the Son of God. Born from the Father before the ages, in the fullness of time became in the womb of the Mother the Emmanuel, that is God with us; he deigned to assume our fragile nature in the unity of his Person when “the Word became flesh and came to live among us” (Jn. 1: 14), that is started to be in a marvellous way that which we are, without ceasing to be that which he was, assuming our nature in a way that he did not lose his.

Mary brought to the light her first-born Son, which is the Son of her womb; she brought to the light he who before creation was God born of God, and in his created humanity was above every other creature. “And she called him Jesus” (Mt. 1: 25).

Jesus therefore is the name of the Son of the Virgin, announced by the angel, to signify that he would save his people from their sins. He who saves from sins will save also from the disorders that are derived from the sins of the soul and in the body.

The word Christ indicates priestly or royal dignity. In the Law the priests and kings were called “christs” from “chrism”, that is anointed with sacred oil: they were a sign of He who at his appearing in the world as the true King and Pontiff, was “consecrated with the oil of happiness in preference of his equals” (Ps. 44: 8).

From this anointing, that is chrism, is derived the word “Christ”, and they who participate in his anointing, that is to his spiritual grace, are called “Christians”.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, that is the Saviour deigned to save us from our sins; he who is the Pontiff, reconciles us with God the Father; he gives us the eternal kingdom of his Father, he who is King and lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial. *Is. 7: 14; 1 Jn. 4: 10*

R: Behold the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son, * he will be called Emmanuel.

V: God has sent his Son as the victim of expiation for our sins.

R: He will be called Emmanuel.

YEAR B

Gospel. *Lk. 1: 26 – 38*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!"

But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible."

[Luke 1:38] And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Third Reading. *Hom. 3 for Advent*

Behold you will conceive and give to the light a son.

A reading from the "Homilies" of St. Bede the Venerable, presbyter.

Dearest brothers, the reading today of the holy gospel reminds us of the beginning of our redemption, when God sent from heaven an angel to announce to the Virgin the new birth of his Son in the human nature, so that freed from the corruption of the old man and becoming new men, we could be numbered among the sons of God. Let us try therefore to perceive with

attentive ears this origin in order to merit attaining the gifts of salvation that have been promised to us.

“The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Judah called Nazareth, to a virgin, bride of a man called Joseph. The virgin was called Mary” (Lk. 1: 26 – 27). That which is said of the house of David refers not only to Joseph, but also to Mary, because according to the Law everyone had to choose his wife from his own tribe or family, as the Apostle also attests, writing to Timothy: “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the descendants of David, has risen from the dead, according to my gospel” (2 Tm. 2: 8). Therefore the Lord truly belongs to the descendants of David, because his virgin Mother had her origins really from the descendants of David.

Entering into her house, the angel said: “Do not fear, Mary, because you have found favour with God, behold you will conceive a son, you will give him to the light and you will call him Jesus. He will be great and called Son of the Most High; the Lord will give him the throne of his father David” (Lk. 1: 30 – 32). For throne of David is understood the kingdom of the people of Israel, that in his time David governed with faithful dedication, by the command and with the help of God. The Lord gave to our Redeemer the throne of David his father when he disposed his incarnation of the Davidic descendants, so that he could lead to the eternal kingdom with the spiritual grace the people that David had governed with a temporal power. As the Apostle says: “He has freed us from the power of darkness and has transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1: 13). “He will reign forever over the house of Jacob” (Lk. 1: 33). House of David can be said of all the Church, that through the faith and adhesion to Christ participates in the destiny of the patriarchs, as much as in the descendants of their race, that in those who, coming from other nations, through baptism are reborn in Christ. In this house he will reign forever, “and his kingdom will have no end” (Lk. 1: 33). He will reign in the present life, because he rules the hearts of the elected living in them with faith and with his love; and he guides them with a continuous protection to merit the gifts of the eternal prize. And he will reign in the future life, when, at the end of their temporal exile, he will introduce them into the heavenly homeland, where, won over by the vision of his continuous presence, they will be happy to do nothing else but to dedicate themselves to him in praise.

Responsorial. *Lk. 1: 39 – 45*

R: Then Mary said to the angel: Here I am, I am the handmaid of the Lord:
* let that which you have said happen to me.

V: The Holy Spirit will descend on you, on you the power of the Most High will spread his shadow.

R: Let that which you have said happen to me.

YEAR C

Gospel. *Lk. 1: 39 – 45*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Third Reading. *Disc. 2 for Advent.*

Behold the king comes.

A reading from the “Discourses” of the blessed Guerrico, abbot

Behold the king comes, let us run to meet our Saviour! Solomon says well: “Like fresh water for a parched throat is a good news from a far away country” (Prov. 25: 25). A good news is that which announces the coming of the Saviour, the reconciliation of the world, the goods of the future life. A news of this type is refreshing water, a drink of healthy wisdom, for the soul that is thirsting for God; and in truth, he who announces to someone the coming or other mysteries of the Saviour, draws water for him with joy at the springs of salvation” (Is. 12: 3) and gives it to him to drink. And the soul that has received the announcement, from Isaiah or from some other prophet seems to answer with the words of Elizabeth: How is it that the Lord comes to me? Behold, as soon as the voice of your greeting reached

my ears, my spirit exulted for joy (cfr. Lk. 1: 43 – 44) for the ardent desire to run and meet its Saviour.

Therefore our spirit rises up with vivid joy, and runs to meet its Saviour: it adores and greets him with festive shouts, while he is still coming from far away: Come, O Lord, “Save me and I will be saved” (Jer. 17: 14); come, “let your face shine on us, and we will be saved” (Ps. 79: 4). “In you we hope, be our salvation in the time of anguish” (Is. 33: 2). In this way the prophets and the just men, with desire and love, ran a long time ago to meet the Christ who was to come, desiring, if it would have been possible, to see with their own eyes he whom they foresaw with the spirit. The Scripture seems to demand from us such a joy, that even our spirit, lifting itself up above itself, desires to go to meet in some way Christ who comes, it stretches out with desire and, not tolerating delays, forces itself to already see the promised event. I think that the exhortation of many passages of the Scriptures to go to meet him refer not only to his second coming, but also to the first. In what way? Like at the second coming we will go to meet him exultant, also with the steps of the body, at the first we have to go to meet him with love and exultation of the heart.

And certainly, according to the merit and the love, that visit of the Lord in every soul is frequent, in this time that passes between the first and the last coming, a time that makes us conformed to the first and prepares us for the last. He comes in us now in order not to render vain for us his first coming, and in order not to return angry with us in the second. With these visits, he tends to reform our proud mentality in order to make it in keeping with his humility, that he demonstrates to us coming the first time; and he does this in order “to transfigure our miserable bodies and to conform it to his glorious body” (Phil. 3: 21), that will be manifested at his return.

We however, brothers, are not yet consoled by such a sublime experience: in order that we can patiently wait for the coming of the Lord, we are consoled in the meantime by a sure faith and a pure conscience, that with joy can say faithfully, with Paul: “I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is capable of preserving my deposit until that day” (2 Tm. 1: 12), that is “at the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2: 13), to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial. *Lk. 1: 42. 45*

R: Blessed are you among women, * and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

V: Blessed. O Mary, you who have believed in the fulfilment of the words of the Lord.

R: and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

17 DECEMBER

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 40: 1 – 11*

Consolation of Jerusalem.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, and that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people is grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Responsorial. *Is. 40: 2; Zec. 1: 16, 17*

R: Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and shout: * his slavery is finished, his iniquity has been expiated.

V: I will again turn to Jerusalem with compassion; the Lord will again have pity on Sion and he will again elect Jerusalem.

R: his slavery is finished, his iniquity has been expiated.

Second Reading. *Bk. 4, disc. 2*

God the Father has made him mercy and justice for us.

A reading from the “Commentary on the prophet Isaiah” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

In the preceding discourse it was said amply of Cyrus, king of the Persians and of the Medes, that he devastated the regions of Babylon, he destroyed with force, relieved in that country the slavery of Israel and loosened their chains, he made them construct the temple of Jerusalem, and was pushed to fight against the Chaldeans, moved by God himself, that he “has broken the bronze doors and broken the iron bars”(Ps. 106: 16; Is. 45: 2). That narration had a limited argument as object: only those belonging to the race of the Israelites were to be placed in a condition of tranquillity and freedom from the distress of slavery.

But then the discourse acquires all its importance when it begins to deal with the same Emmanuel, sent by God the Father to preach to the prisoners liberty and the sight to the blind, to snatch from evil those who, without escape, were compelled in their chains by their sins, to attract anew to themselves all men of the earth, freed from the tyranny of the devil, bringing them back through him to God the Father.

He became the Mediator between God and men; through him we are reconciled with the Father in only one Spirit and, according to the Scriptures, he is our peace: he himself will restore the divine things, that is his temple which is the Church, at the end to make it appear in front of him as a pure virgin, without stain or wrinkle, or anything similar, but holy and immaculate (cfr. Ep. 5: 27). Therefore it is easy to recognise in Christ and in his gestures a figure of the divine and marvellous benefits conceded by God to all men of the earth. And this is the end for which those gestures are remembered. Therefore the heavens rejoice, that is those who are in the superior city, in a dwelling of light and glory, the angels and archangels! Let us say that the conversion of men to God led by Christ, Saviour of all of us, the sight given to the blind, in one word the salvation of so many who are lost, was a reason for joy even for the heavenly spirits. In fact, if they are

glad for only one sinner who repents, how can we doubt that they will be glad and rejoice in seeing the entire world saved? For this it is said: "Pour forth, o heavens from above, and you clouds make justice rain down" (Is. 45: 8). We say that mercy is love, made perfect by the law, united to the evangelical justice, of which Christ himself has become for us the giver and master. It can also be said that mercy and justice, that are born and grow from the earth, are the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Because God the Father has made him mercy and justice for us, if it is true that we have obtained mercy in him and, justified with the forgiveness of the past faults, we have received from him the justice that makes us heirs of all the goods, and he is the way of our salvation.

But if the earth is commanded to make justice grow, no one will be surprised thinking that the psalmist also says of God the Father and of the same Emmanuel: "He has worked salvation in our land" (Ps. 73: 12). Christ has not brought his humanity to us from the heights of heaven, but he was born according to the flesh from a woman, one of these who are on the earth. When in fact it is said that he is the fruit and shoot of the earth, it is meant that he was born according to the flesh from a woman, elevated to this mission even though belonging to this earth.

Responsorial. *Ps. 95: 11; Is. 49: 13; Ps. 71: 7*

R: The heavens rejoice, the earth exults, cry out with joy, o mountains; * because the Lord consoles his people and has pity on his poor.

V: In his days justice will flower and peace will abound.

R: because the Lord consoles his people and has pity on his poor.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 45: 1 – 13*

The salvation of Israel through Cyrus.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: "I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut

asunder the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I gird you, though you do not know me, that men may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.

I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe, I am the LORD, who does all these things. "Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth, and let it cause righteousness to spring up also; I the LORD have created it.

"Woe to him who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashions it, 'What are you making'? or 'Your work has no handles'? Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' or to a woman, 'With what are you in travail?'"

Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands? I made the earth, and created man upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded their entire host. I have aroused him in righteousness, and I will make straight all his ways; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward," says the LORD of hosts.

Responsorial. *cfr. Is. 45: 8; 16: 1 vulg.*

R: Heavens, drip down the dew, clouds rain the Just one; * the land opens itself, and the Saviour springs forth.

V: Send, Lord, the Lamb, Dominator of the world; let him come from the desert to the mountain of Sion.

R: The land opens itself, and the Saviour springs forth.

Second Reading. *Lett. 31, 2 – 3*

Sacrament of our salvation.

A reading from the "Letters" of St. Leo the Great, pope.

But it is of no avail to say that our Lord, the Son of the blessed Virgin Mary, was true and perfect man, if He is not believed to be Man of that stock which is attributed to Him in the Gospel. For Matthew says, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham:" and follows the order of His human origin, so as to bring the lines of His ancestry down to Joseph to whom the Lord's mother was espoused. Whereas Luke going backwards step by step traces His succession to the first of the human race himself, to show that the first Adam and the last Adam were of the same nature.

No doubt the Almighty Son of God could have appeared for the purpose of teaching, and justifying men in exactly the same way that He appeared both to patriarchs and prophets in the semblance of flesh; for instance, when He engaged in a struggle, and entered into conversation (with Jacob), or when He refused not hospitable entertainment, and even partook of the food set before Him. But these appearances were indications of that Man whose reality it was announced by mystic predictions would be assumed from the stock of preceding patriarchs. And the fulfilment of the mystery of our atonement, which was ordained from all eternity, was not assisted by any figures because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon the Virgin, and the power of the Most High had not over-shadowed her: so that "Wisdom building herself a house" within her undefiled body, "the Word became flesh;" and the form of God and the form of a slave coming together into one person, the Creator of times was born in time; and He Himself through whom all things were made, was brought forth in the midst of all things.

For if the New Man had not been made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and taken on Him our old nature, and being consubstantial with the Father, had deigned to be consubstantial with His mother also, and being alone free from sin, had united our nature to Him the whole human race would be held in bondage beneath the Devil's yoke, and we should not be able to make use of the Conqueror's victory, if it had been won outside our nature.

But from Christ's marvellous sharing of the two natures, the mystery of regeneration shone upon us that through the self-same spirit, through whom Christ was conceived and born, we too, who were born through the desire of the flesh, might be born again from a spiritual source: and consequently, the Evangelist speaks of believers as those "who were born not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Responsorial. *cfr. Is. 11: 10; Lk. 1: 32*

R: Behold, the shoot of Jesse will be lifted up as salvation of the people; the nations will invoke him; * his name will be glorious.

V: The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will reign forever over the house of Jacob.

R: his name will be glorious.

Gospel. *Mt. 1: 1 – 17*

Genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Ammin'adab, and Ammin'adab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uri'ah, and Solomon the father of Rehobo'am, and Rehobo'am the father of Abi'jah, and Abi'jah the father of Asa, and Asa the father of Jehosh'aphat, and Jehosh'aphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzzi'ah, and Uzzi'ah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezeki'ah, and Hezeki'ah the father of Manas'seh, and Manas'seh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josi'ah, and Josi'ah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoni'ah was the father of She-al'ti-el, and She-al'ti-el the father of Zerub'babel, and Zerub'babel the father of Abi'ud, and Abi'ud the father of Eli'akim, and Eli'akim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eli'ud, and Eli'ud the father of Elea'zar, and Elea'zar the father

of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

18 DECEMBER

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 40: 12 – 18, 21 – 31*

The greatness of the Lord.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as his counsellor has instructed him?

Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the isles like fine dust. Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

It is he, who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nought, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hid from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the

ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary, his understanding is inscrutable He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Responsorial. *Rm. 11: 34; Is. 40: 14*

R: Who could ever know the mind of the Lord? Or who has ever been his councillor? * Who has given him something first that he should receive in exchange?

V: Of whom has he asked council, so that he can instruct him and teach him the paths of justice?

R: Who has given him something first, that he should receive in exchange?

Second Reading. *Bk. 3, t. 4*

Behold He has with him the reward and his trophies precede him.

A reading from the “Commentary on the prophet Isaiah” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

“Behold, your God! Behold, the Lord God comes with power, with his arm he holds the dominion” (Is. 40: 10). These are words that are addressed to those to whom the preaching of salvation has been entrusted, that is to the holy apostles and evangelists, and also, let it be said once and for all, to those who in the following times will be the guides of the flock of God and who will celebrate the holy mysteries: words that show how much they can be lovers of God, capable of arousing enthusiasm and full of the greatest glory. It is not suitable, says the text, that the preachers of the gospel, in making known the glory and the salvation of God to all and everywhere, should do it with timidity and submissively, almost trying to hide it; let them speak instead with influential people placed high up, with great freedom and without any fear. The disciples of the divine Master prayed for this, addressing themselves to God, Lord of the universe. “Lift up your voice”, it is written, do not fear, “announce to the city of Judah: Behold your God” Behold the Lord God comes with power, with his arm he holds the dominion”. In repeating: “Behold” he does not let the hope of his coming be stretched out vaguely, but makes us understand that the

Redeemer will come soon, shortly, that is, that he is already near, at the doors. He almost invites us to stretch out the hand and to indicate with the finger he who is announced. And he shows clearly that he will not come like one of the prophets, nor as a beggar, but with the authority of the Lord, with the power and dominion that belongs to God: “He comes with power, with his arm he holds the dominion” The divine economy of this mystery does not leave us without the recompense of he who for us became ours, and bore the cross and died on it: “Behold, he has with him the prize, and his trophies precede him” (Is. 40: 10). And he says which is the prize, fruit of his death: “Truly, truly I say to you: if the seed of grain does not fall to the ground and die, it remains alone; if instead it dies, it produces much fruit” (Jn. 12: 24). Therefore this divine economy does not let us lack either the recompense or the fruit. And they have followed him: the flocks are as if thronged under the eyes of Him who has gathered the lambs with his arm, which is with his power. Those who believe in him, like newborn lambs, have been introduced into a new life, with a generation received from on high and through the Holy Spirit. First of all therefore they ask for the spiritual milk and are fed like babies, but then they grow up to the perfect age of Christ. The lambs therefore have been nourished, and the mother ewes have been consoled. Under this image of the newborn lambs we can understand with reason the pagans who have been converted.

Responsorial. *Ap. 22: 12, 6*

R: Behold, I will come soon, and I will bring with me my salary, says the Lord, * in order to render to each one according to his works.

V: These words are sure and they are true. Behold I will come soon,

R: in order to render to each one according to his works.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 46: 1 – 13*

Against the idols of Babylon.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle; these things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop, they

bow down together, they cannot save the burden, but they go into captivity.

“Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to grey hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

"To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! They lift it upon their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble.

"Remember this and consider, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

"Hearken to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from deliverance: I bring near my deliverance, it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory."

Responsorial. *Is. 46: 12 – 13*

R: Listen to me, you who lose courage, and are far away from justice. *I will dispense in Sion the salvation to Israel, object of my glory.

V: I will make my justice draw near: it is not far away, my salvation will not delay.

R: I will dispense in Sion the salvation to Israel, object of my glory.

Second Reading. *C. 8: 5 – 9, 6*

God reveals his love through his Son.

A reading from the “Letter to Diognetus”

In truth no man has ever seen God, nor has made him known, but he has revealed himself. And he has revealed himself in faith, to which only is conceded the possibility of seeing God. In fact God, Lord and Creator of the universe, he who has given origin to everything and has disposed

everything according to an order, not only loves men, but is also forbearing. And he was always like this, is still like this and will always be like this: loving, good, tolerant, and faithful; he alone is truly good. And having conceived in his heart a great and ineffable design, he communicated it only to his Son.

In all the time therefore in which he conserved and guarded his wise plan in mystery, it seemed that he neglected us, and never gave a thought to us; but when through his beloved Son he revealed and brought to our notice that which had been prepared from the beginning, all together he offered to us: the possibility to enjoy his benefits and to contemplate and understand them. Who among us would have expected all these favours?

After having disposed everything inside himself together with the Son, he permitted that we would remain at the mercy of disordered instincts until the above mentioned time and that we would be dragged out from the right way by the pleasures and by greed, following our judgement. Certainly he was not pleased by our sins, but he bore them; neither could he approve that time of iniquity, but he prepared the actual age of justice, because, knowing us in that time of clearly being unworthy of life because of our works, he made us worthy by his mercy and as, after having shown our impossibility of entering into his kingdom with our efforts, he made us capable by his power.

Then when our injustice reached its highest point and it was already clear that we were threatened with, as payment, only punishment and death, there arrived the time pre-established by God to reveal his love and power (O immense goodness and love of God!), he did not hold us in hate, nor did he repel us, nor did he take revenge. On the contrary he bore us with patience. In his mercy he took on himself our sins. He spontaneously gave us his Son as the prize of our ransom: the holy one for the wicked, the innocent for the evil, the just for the iniquitous, the incorruptible for the corrupt, the immortal for the mortal. What could have cancelled our faults if not his justice? How could we, who were led astray and wicked, find again justice if not in the unique Son of God? O sweet exchange, O ineffable creation, O unforeseen wealth of benefits: the injustice of many was pardoned by only one just man and the justice of only one man took away the wickedness of many!

Responsorial. *cfr. Act. 4: 12; Is. 9: 5*

R: In no one else is there salvation; * there is no other name under heaven in which we can be saved.

V: His name is: admirable Councillor, powerful God, Father of the world that is to come, Prince of peace;

R: there is no other name under heaven in which we can be saved.

Gospel. Mt. 1: 18 – 24

Jesus is born of Mary, the bride of Joseph, son of David.

A reading from the Gospel of to St. Matthew.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, who, without his coming to know her, gave birth to a son, whom he called Jesus.

19 DECEMBER

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 41: 8 – 20*

Promise of a new Exodus.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"; fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I will help you."

Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you, says the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make of you a threshing sledge, new, sharp, and having teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and crush them, and you shall make the hills like chaff; you shall winnow them and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. And you shall rejoice in the LORD; in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together; that men may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Responsorial. *Mt. 12: 17; Is. 42: 1; Dt. 18: 15*

R: Behold my servant, in whom I am well pleased, * I will put my spirit over him, and he will announce justice to the nations.

V: The Lord your God will raise up a prophet for you, in your midst, from among your brothers.

R: I will put my spirit over him, and he will announce justice to the nations.

Second Reading. *Disc. 61a, 1 – 3*

The Birth of Christ the Lord is near.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Maximus of Turin, bishop.

Even if I was to keep silent, brothers, the time informs us that the Birth of Christ the Lord is near; already these last days anticipate my discourse. The world with its same difficulties speaks of the imminence of something that will renew it, and desires with an impatient expectation that the splendour of a more brilliant sun will illuminate its darkness. While, because of the briefness of the hours, it fears that its journey is about to finish, with a certain type of hope it discovers that the year is transforming its course. This expectation of creation persuades us also to await the rising of Christ, the new Sun, so that he may illuminate the darkness of our sins; that this Sun of justice, with the strength of his birth, may dissipate the dense fog of our faults and that he may not permit that our life closes itself in a shabby obscurity, but rather that it may be enlarged by the grace of his power. And so that we may have a presentiment of the Birth of the Lord from the same signs of nature, let us also do what it does: As in that day the duration of the light begins to increase on the earth, so also let us increase the measure of our virtue; the light of that day is common to the poor and to the rich, so also our generosity should extend to the wayfarer and to the destitute; and as the earth makes the darkness of its nights recede, so also let us repel the darkness of our avarice. Therefore, brothers, while we are about to welcome the Birth of the Lord, let us clothe ourselves with neat garments, without stain. I speak of the clothes of the soul, not that of the body. Let us dress ourselves up not with the clothes of silk, but with holy works! The magnificent clothes can cover the limbs but cannot adorn the conscience and it is a more serious embarrassment to walk with splendid clothes while acting with corrupt sentiments. Let us first adorn the conscience of the interior man, so that also the habit of the exterior man

may be adorned, let us wash the stains of the spirit, so that the clothes of the body may shine brightly! The splendour of the clothes is useless if the interior is sordid, because if the conscience is in darkness all the body is in darkness.

But we possess a means of cancelling the stains of the conscience, because it is written: "Give in almsgiving, and behold everything will be cleansed for you"(Lk. 11: 41). This commandment of almsgiving is good, which makes the hands active and the heart clean!

Responsorial. *cfr. Lk. 19: 10; Ps. 79: 20*

R: Now our Saviour will come, the Redeemer announced by Gabriel and conceived by Mary; * the Lord comes to free the lost man, whom he himself had moulded.

V: Lift us up, Lord, God of hosts, let your face shine on us, and we shall be saved.

R: The Lord comes to free the lost man, whom he himself has moulded.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 47: 1. 3b – 15*

Lamentation over Babylon.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chalde'ans! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no man. Our Redeemer -- the LORD of hosts is his name -- is the Holy One of Israel. Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chalde'ans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms.

I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand, you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy.

You said, "I shall be mistress for ever," so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end.

Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a

widow or know the loss of children": These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments. You felt secure in your wickedness, you said, "No one sees me"; your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me."

But evil shall come upon you, for which you cannot atone; disaster shall fall upon you, which you will not be able to expiate; and ruin shall come on you suddenly, of which you know nothing.

Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have laboured from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed, perhaps you may inspire terror. You are wearied with your many counsels; let them stand forth and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons predict what shall befall you. Behold, they are like stubble, the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before! Such to you are those with whom you have laboured, who have trafficked with you from your youth; they wander about each in his own direction; there is no one to save you.

Responsorial. *is. 49: 13; 47: 4*

R: Exult O heavens, rejoice, O earth; O mountains, shout with joy: * the Lord consoles his people.

V: Our redeemer is the God of the universe, the Holy One of Israel:

R: the Lord consoles his people.

Second Reading. *Bk. 3, 20. 2 – 3*

The incarnation that has redeemed us.

A reading from the treatise "Against the heresies" of St. Irenaeus, bishop.

God is man's glory, but it is man who receives the effect of God's activity, who is the recipient of all God's wisdom and power.

Just as a doctor proves himself in his patients, so God reveals himself in men. That is why Paul states: 'God has imprisoned all in unbelief that he may have mercy on all'. He is speaking here of man, who was excluded

from immortality as a result of his disobedience to God, but then obtained mercy through the Son of God by receiving adoption in him.

Without pride or boastfulness, man should have a true evaluation of created things and of their creator, that is, of God, the supremely powerful, who gave existence to all things. He should abide in love of God, in submission, in thanksgiving. If he does, he will receive a greater glory from God and will go on until he becomes like the one who died for him.

He too was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, in order to condemn sin and, as something now condemned, to expel it from the flesh. He came to invite man to become like himself, commissioning him to imitate God, placing him under obedience to the Father so as to see God, giving him the power to apprehend the Father. He who did this is the Word of God, who dwelt in man and became Son of man in order to accustom man to receive God and accustom God to dwell in man, in accordance with the Father's will.

That is why he is a sign of our salvation, Immanuel, born of the Virgin, a sign given us by the Lord himself. It was the Lord who saved men, because they were incapable of saving themselves. When Paul says: 'I know that nothing good dwells in my flesh', he is affirming this weakness of man, and he is indicating that the 'good' that is our salvation comes not from ourselves but from God. In another passage he says: 'Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?' and then he introduces the rescuer: 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Isaiah too makes the same point: 'Be strong, weak hands and feeble knees; pluck up your courage, faint-hearted. Be strong, do not be afraid. See, our God is coming with justice and with retribution; he is coming himself to save us' – it is not by ourselves but by the help of God that we are saved.

Responsorial. *cfr. Jer. 31: 10; Is. 12: 2, 5*

R: Listen to the word of the Lord, o peoples; announce it to the ends of the earth. Say to the distant islands: * Behold God, our salvation.

V: Let it be known to all the earth:

R: Behold God, our salvation!

Gospel. Lk. 1: 5 – 25

The birth of John the Baptist is announced by the angel.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abi'jah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth; for he will be great before the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."

And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they wondered at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five

months she hid herself, saying, "Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."

20 DECEMBER

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 41: 21 – 29*

The Lord, the unique God, is he who pre announces the liberator Cyrus.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Set forth your case, says the LORD; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come.

Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified. Behold, you are nothing, and your work is nought; an abomination is he who chooses you.

I stirred up one from the north, and he has come, from the rising of the sun, and he shall call on my name; he shall trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay.

Who declared it from the beginning, that we might know, and beforetime that we might say, "He is right"? There was none who declared it, none who proclaimed, none who heard your words.

I first have declared it to Zion, and I give to Jerusalem a herald of good tidings. But when I look there is no one; among these there is no counsellor who, when I ask, gives an answer. Behold, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their molten images are empty wind.

Responsorial. *Dt. 18: 18; Lk. 20: 13; Jn. 6: 14*

R: I will raise up for them a prophet and I will put my words in his mouth * and he will tell them all that I will command him.

V: I will send my unique Son; this is truly the prophet who is to come into the world.

R: and he will tell them all that I will command him.

Second Reading. *Bk. 4, disc. 4*

The inspired prophet pre announces God is with us.

A reading from the “Commentary on the prophet Isaiah” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

It is written: “Behold, the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son, whom she will call Emmanuel” (Is. 7: 14). The angel Gabriel, revealing the mystery to the holy Virgin, Mother of God, says to her: “Do not fear, Mary, because you have found grace with God. Behold, you will conceive a son, you will bring him to the light and you will call him Jesus (Lk. 1: 30 – 31). He will save his people from their sins” (Mt.1: 21).

Is it possible perhaps that here the angel and the prophet said things that were contradictory? No. The prophet of God speaking in inspiration of the mystery, pre- announced God-with-us, calling him with a name that indicates the divine nature mysteriously united to the human nature. The angel instead reveals the name that designates his work and the mission: he saves his people, and for this he is called Saviour.

In the moment in which he submits for us to this human birth, a multitude of angels announce to the shepherds this favourable and happy event: “ Do not fear: behold I announce to you a great joy, which will be for all the people: today in the city of David has been born for you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2: 10 – 11). He is called Emmanuel because he has made himself by nature God-with-us, that is man; and Jesus, because he has to save the world, he, God himself made man. At his birth in the human nature he was called by name. It was not suitable to call him Christ the Word of God before his birth according to the flesh. When he had not yet received the anointing, how could he be called Christ, that is the Anointed? When he appeared in our nature, then he received the name that was given to him at his human birth. Then his mouth was made “Like a sharpened sword”(Is. 49: 2). This also is true. The same prophet Isaiah says: justice will be the sash around his loins, faithfulness the belt around his waist, and with the breath of his mouth he will kill the impious” (Is. 11: 5, 4). The divine word of the gospel announced from the mouth of Christ was a sharpened and very piercing sword against the tyranny of the devil, “against the dominators of this world of darkness, the spirits of evil” (Ep. 6: 12). It dissipated the darkness of error, it diffused in all the hearts a ray of the true knowledge of God, it guided the world to a holy transformation of life, infusing in men the love for good, and almost destroyed and put an end to the sin of the world rendering just the impious by means of the faith and

filling with the Holy Spirit those who converted to him. To these he gave the gift to become sons of God, he infused in them a strong and courageous soul in battle, and consigned to them the sword of the Spirit, that is the word of God, so that, resisting against those who before had overcome them in strength, they could run without obstacles towards the goal that God calls us to receive up there (cfr. Phil. 3: 14).

The prophet Isaiah declares openly that the moral doctrine and the initiation to the divine mysteries brought by Christ destroy the tyranny of the devil in those who live on the earth: “In that day the Lord will punish with the heavy sword, great and strong, the tortuous serpent, and he will kill the dragon” (Is. 27: 1)

“O depth of wealth, of the wisdom and of the science of God!” (Rm. 11: 33). The Son was, and in fact, is free, He who was born in a hidden way from the roots of the Being that reigned over all things. Yet he heard the Father say: “You are my servant ” (Is. 49: 3). And thus the Word, free by nature, involved in the economy of the flesh and according to the flesh, made himself servant and makes you meditate on his birth in time, according to the flesh, from a woman. The Father says that he is Israel in that which concerns the flesh, but adds also “and in you I will manifest my glory” (Is. 49: 3).

God was exalted by means of the holy prophets also, but not in them. In Christ, instead, he was exalted and in a truly extraordinary way, in a way in which only he could be. In the same Christ we see the Father glorified in his divine majesty, in power and in his holiness and justice, in his immense clemency. In Christ the Divinity is revealed in a perceptible form.

Responsorial. *Is. 7: 14; 9: 5, 6; cfr. Lk. 1: 32-33*

R: Behold the Virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son, says the Lord; * and he will be called wonderful Counsellor, powerful God.

V: He will sit on the throne of David and he will reign forever.

R: and he will be called wonderful Counsellor, powerful God

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 48: 1 – 11*

God is the only Lord of the future.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Hear this, O house of Jacob, who is called by the name of Israel, and who came forth from the loins of Judah; who swear by the name of the LORD, and confess the God of Israel, but not in truth or right. For they call themselves after the holy city, and stay themselves on the God of Israel; the LORD of hosts is his name.

"The former things I declared of old, they went forth from my mouth and I made them known; then suddenly I did them and they came to pass. Because I know that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew and your forehead brass, I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you, lest you should say, 'My idol did them, my graven image and my molten image commanded them.' "You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it?

From this time forth I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known. They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them, lest you should say, 'Behold, I knew them.' You have never heard, you have never known, from of old your ear has not been opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and that from birth you were called a rebel.

"For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

Responsorial. *cfr. Is 48: 10 – 11; 54: 8*

R: I have tried you in the fire of suffering. For me, for my name I act: * I will not give my glory to others.

V: In a fit of anger, for a little while I hid my face from you; but with everlasting affection I had pity on you.

R: I will not give my glory to others.

Second Reading. Hom. 4, 8 – 9

The entire world awaits the answer of Mary.

A reading from the “Homilies on the Madonna” of St. Bernard, abbot.

You have heard, Virgin, that you will conceive and will give birth to a son; you have heard that this will happen not through the work of a man, but by the work of the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits the answer: he has to return to God who has sent him. We also await, o Lady, a word of compassion, we who are oppressed miserably by a sentence of damnation.

Behold to you is offered the prize of our salvation, if you agree, we will be immediately freed. All of us were created in the eternal Word of God, but now we are subjects of death: with your brief answer we can be renewed and recalled to life.

Adam exiled from paradise with his miserable descendants, implore you in tears, pious Virgin; Abraham and David entreat you; the holy patriarchs who are your ancestors, they who also live in the dark regions of death, entreat you. All the world is in waiting, prostrated at your knees, from your mouth depends the consolation of the miserable, the redemption of prisoners, the liberation of the condemned, the salvation of all the sons of Adam, of all the human race.

O Virgin, give your answer quickly. Respond promptly to the angel, rather, through the angel, to the Lord. Answer with your word and receive the Word: give there your human word and conceive the divine Word, emit the word that passes and receive the eternal Word.

Why do you delay? Why do you fear? Believe in the work of the Lord, give your assent to it, welcome it. In your humility be audacious, in your modesty take courage. In no way should you now, in your virginal simplicity, forget prudence; but only in this thing, O prudent Virgin, you must not fear presumption. Because, if in silence modesty is welcome, now instead the piety in the word is necessary. Open, blessed Virgin, the heart to the faith, the lips to assent, the womb to the Creator. Behold he to whom the desires of all the nations are turned, is outside the door knocking. May it not be that while you are hesitant, he passes by and you have to, sorrowfully, begin again to search for him whom you love. Get up, run, open! Get up with faith, run with devotion, open with your assent.

Say "Here I am, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let that which you have said happen to me" (Lk. 1: 38).

Responsorial. *cfr. Lk. 1: 31, 42*

R: Welcome the word, Virgin Mary, the announcement of the angel of the Lord: You will conceive in your womb the man- God. * They will say of you: Blessed among women!

V: You will give birth to a son, and you will be a mother always virgin.

R: They will say of you: Blessed among women!

Gospel. *Lk. 1: 26 – 38*

Behold, you will conceive and bring to the light a son.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

21 DECEMBER

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 42: 10 – 25*

Hymn to God the saviour. The blindness of Israel.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth! Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants. Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare his praise in the coastlands.

The LORD goes forth like a mighty man, like a man of war he stirs up his fury; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes.

For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant. I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools.

And I will lead the blind in a way that they know not, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them. They shall be turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in graven images, who say to molten images, "You are our gods." Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see! Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD?

He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear.

The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious. But this is a people robbed and plundered, they are all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become a prey with none to rescue, a spoil with none to say, "Restore!"

Who among you will give ear to this, will attend and listen for the time to come? Who gave up Jacob to the spoiler, and Israel to the robbers? Was

it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey? So he poured upon him the heat of his anger and the might of battle; it set him on fire round about, but he did not understand; it burned him, but he did not take it to heart.

Responsorial. *Is. 42: 16; Jn. 8: 12*

R: I will lead the blind by ways that they do not know, I will guide them through unknown paths, * I will transform the darkness into light in front of them, the rough places into plains.

V: He who follows me will not walk in darkness.

R: I will transform the darkness into light in front of them, the rough places into plains.

Second Reading. *Disc. 1 for Christmas*

Behold, the days will come when I will raise up for David a just shoot.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Odilone of Cluny, abbot.

“Behold I am with you all the days, until the end of the world” (Mt. 28: 20). If he has promised to be with his faithful all the days, how much more will he be present to us on the day of his Birth, if our service will be more fervent. He is the wisdom that says through Solomon: “I have come out of the mouth of the Most High”, first born of every creature (Sir. 24: 5); and again: “The Lord created me at the beginning of his activity, before all his work, right from then. From eternity I have been constituted” (Pr. 8: 22-23). And he says in Jeremiah: “Don’t I fill up the heavens and the earth?” (Jer. 24: 24). Yet, he is the one who, by the marvellous and mysterious design of God was born to human life, and placed in a manger; he who, according to the oracle of Solomon, existed *ab aeterno* before time, and who according to Isaiah is present everywhere.

He is forever, and cannot be absent from any place. A heavenly trumpet, with the voice of a great number of elect, sweetly announces how true and faithful are the testimonies of the ancient fathers on the eternity of Christ and on the immensity of his divine presence: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever!” (Heb. 13: 8). And the Saviour himself says to the Jews in the gospel: “Before Abraham was, I am” (Jn. 8: 58). But even if he existed before Abraham or, better, from eternity with God the Father before the creation, he wanted to be born in time, of the stock of

Abraham. In fact God says to Abraham: “In your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Gn. 22: 18).

Even the patriarch David merited the remarkable privilege of a similar promise: God the Father, teaching him wisdom in his heart (cfr. Ps. 50: 8) says: “I will put the fruit of your loins on your throne!” (Ps. 131: 11). The prophet Isaiah, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, in considering the magnificence of this most noble shoot, and the sublimity and excellence of its very sweet fruit, pre-announced: “In that day the shoot of the Lord will grow in honour and glory and the fruit of the earth will be magnificent and ornamental” (Is. 4: 2).

These two fathers, who better than the others received in a more explicit way the promise of the coming of the Saviour, in the gospel of Matthew merit justly the first place in the beginning: “Genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham” (Mt. 1:1). On these sacred words of the evangelist converge the oracles of the prophets and the words of the apostles. The prophet Isaiah is studied in order to hand down in a clearer way that the Mediator between God and men was born according to the flesh of the stock of Abraham, and he says in the person of God the Father: “You, Israel, my servant, you Jacob whom I have chosen, descendants of Abraham my friend, you are the one whom I have taken” (Is. 41: 8 – 9).

All those who, freed from the darkness of ignorance and illuminated by the light of faith, in the gospel invoke the Son of God as the son of David, deserve to receive not only the light of the spirit, but also that of the body. Christ the Lord wants to be called with this name because he knows there is no other name in which the world can be saved. Therefore, dearest brothers, in order to merit salvation from him, who is the Saviour, all of us say, all and each one say: Lord, son of David, have pity on us! Amen.

Responsorial. *Jer. 23: 5, 6*

R: Behold the days will come, says the Lord, in which I will raise up for David a just shoot, who will reign as a true king and he will be wise, and he will exercise law and justice on the earth; * and this will be the name with which they will call him: Lord-our-justice.

V: In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will rest secure in his dwelling.

R: And this will be the name with which they will call him: Lord-our-justice.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 48: 12 – 21; 49: 9b – 13*

The new Exodus.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

"Hearken to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am He, I am the first, and I am the last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together. "Assemble, all of you, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chalde'ans.

I, even I, have spoken and called him, I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way. Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there." And now the Lord GOD has sent his Spirit and me.

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me." Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!" They thirsted not when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he cleft the rock and the water gushed out. They shall feed along the ways, on all bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them, for he who has pity on

them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be raised up. Lo, these shall come from afar, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene." Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted.

Responsorial. *Is. 49: 13; Ps. 71: 7*

R: Exult, o heavens; rejoice, o earth, o mountains, shout for joy; * the Lord comes and consoles his people.

V: In his days justice will flourish and peace will abound.

R: the Lord comes and consoles his people.

Second Reading. *Bk. 2, 19. 22 – 23. 26- 27*

The visitation of Mary.

A reading from the “Commentary on Luke” of St. Ambrose, bishop.

The angel, who announced the mystery, wanted to guarantee its truthfulness with a proof and announces to the Virgin Mary the maternity of an old and sterile woman, in order to demonstrate in this way that for God everything that he wants is possible. As soon as Mary heard this, she set out in a hurry towards the mountains, not because she was incredulous about the prophecy or uncertain of the announcement or doubted the proof, but because she was happy because of the promise and desired devoutly to fulfil a service, with an enthusiasm that came from an intimate joy. Where now, overflowing with God, could she hurry if not towards the heights? The grace of the Holy Spirit does not involve slowness. Immediately the benefits of the coming of Mary and of the presence of the Lord are felt. In fact, as soon as Elisabeth had heard the greeting of Mary, the baby exulted in her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit (cfr. Lk. 1: 41). Attention must be paid to the choice of the singular words and to their significance. Elisabeth was the first to hear the voice, but John was the first to perceive the grace; she heard according to the order of nature, he exulted in virtue of the mystery; she heard the arrival of Mary, he of the Lord; the woman, the arrival of the woman, the baby, the arrival of the Baby. The women speak of the grace received, the babies in the womb of their mothers bring to fulfilment the grace and the mystery of the mercy for the advantage

of the mothers themselves: and these because of a double miracle prophesy under the inspiration of the sons that they carry.

Of the son is said that he exults, of the mother that she was full of the Holy Spirit. It was not the mother was the first to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but it was the son, filled with the Holy Spirit, who filled also the mother.

John exults, the spirit of Mary also exults. But while of Elisabeth it is said that she was filled with the Holy Spirit when John exulted, of Mary who was already full of the Holy Spirit, it is said then that her spirit exulted. He, who is incomprehensible, worked in an incomprehensible way in the mother. The one, Elisabeth, was filled with the Holy Spirit after the conception, Mary instead before the conception.

Blessed – she says – are you who have believed (cfr. Lk. 1: 45). But blessed also you who have heard and believed: every soul that believes, conceives and generates the Word of God and recognises his works.

May the soul of Mary be in each one to magnify the Lord, may the spirit of Mary to exult in God be in each one. There is only one mother of Christ according to the flesh; according to the faith, instead, Christ is the fruit of everyone, because every soul receives the Word of God, provided, he is immaculate and immune from vices, preserves the chastity with un-reproachable modesty. Every soul that can maintain itself in this way, magnifies the Lord, as the soul of Mary magnified the Lord, and her spirit exulted in God the Saviour.

As we read in the psalm: “Magnify the Lord with me (cfr. Ps. 33: 4), the Lord is magnified not because the human word can add something to the greatness of the Lord, but so that he may be magnified in us. Christ is the image of God: therefore the soul that fulfils just and pious works, magnifies the image of God in whose likeness it has been created, and while it magnifies, it participates in a certain way in his greatness and elevates itself.

Responsorial. *cfr. Lk. 1: 45, 46; Ps. 65:16*

R: Blessed, are you who have believed: in you will be fulfilled the words of the Lord. And Mary said: * My soul magnifies the Lord.

V: Come, listen, I will narrate all that God has done for me.

R: My soul magnifies the Lord.

Gospel. Lk. 1: 39 – 45

How is it that the mother of my Lord comes to me?

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

22 DECEMBER

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 43: 1 – 13*

The liberation of Israel.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. [Is. 43:3] For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honoured, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.

Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, every one who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears! Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble.

Who among them can declare this, and show us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses to justify them, and let them hear and say, it is true.

"You are my witnesses," says the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He.

Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour. I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses," says the LORD. "I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is none who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it?"

Responsorial. *Is. 43: 10; Jn. 3: 31, 32*

R: You are my witnesses, oracle of the Lord, my servants whom I have chosen * so that you may come to know me, believe in me and understand that I am he.

V: He who comes from heaven is above everyone, he attests to that which he has seen and heard.

R: So that you may come to know me, believe in me and understand that I am he.

Second Reading. Disc. 12

The Lord was sent to us as a redeemer, life and salvation.

A reading from the “ancient discourses translated from Greek to Latin.

The time has come to speak of the advent and of the Incarnation of the Lord, and in these days we must not keep quiet. “Exult, Sion: behold, your king comes” (Zec. 9: 9). Our soul therefore exults, thinking of the future goods and repelling evil from itself. “Behold he will come, he who will live in you”. Who is this dweller, if not he who wants to make us his, and reunite us to him forming of us his beloved people? Of him the prophet sings in another passage: “I will live in their midst and I will walk with them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people” (2 Cor. 6: 16; cfr. Lev. 26: 11 – 12; Ex. 37: 27).

When he will possess fully our heart, he will make everything in us holy, perfect, irreproachable. Therefore he that possesses his redeemed, makes perfect the inexperienced, leads to their destination those whom he has taken out from the land of Babylon! This dweller finds his rest in us, and is glorified by us when men see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven (cfr. Mt. 5: 18). We have become sons of the Father not because of our obedience or because of our merits, not because of a good action, but because of the gift of his mercy and generosity, that he has numbered us among his adoptive sons.

God is glorified in our midst when we progress in the sentiments inspired by charity and practise with perseverance his commandments. No we know that the Lord was sent to us as the redeemer, life and salvation, goodness and gratuitous grace. And when we see that from the mud of the earth he elevates us to the heavenly prizes, the hearts of the believers are glad and exult: our soul searches for the Lord not like a dead man, but exuberant with life.

For these goods what can we render to the Lord? Let us lower our head, bend our neck and beat our breasts, saying like the publican: "O God, have pity on me a sinner!" (Lk. 18: 13). His mercy makes perfect even the imperfect things, for this it follows: "And everything was written in your book" (Ps. 138: 16).

Exult for many benefits, give thanks for his many gifts; do not attribute to yourselves the goods that you have received from him, in order not to lose what you have, but be convinced of not having anything that you have not received: And if you have received, do not boast about it, as if you have not received them (cfr. 1 Cor. 4: 7) so that the gifts that you have may be conserved and those goods that you lack may be brought to its fullness in you. Amen.

Responsorial. *Act. 10: 43: 2, 21, 39*

R: All the prophets render him this testimony: whoever believes in him will obtain the remission of sins in his name: * then whoever invokes the name of the Lord will be saved.

V: The promise is for all those who call on the Lord God.

R: Then whoever invokes the name of the Lord will be saved.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 49: 14 – 50: 1*

The restoration of Sion.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. Your builders outstrip your destroyers, and those who laid you waste go forth from you.

Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the LORD, you shall put them all on as an ornament, you shall bind them on as a bride does. "Surely your waste and your

desolate places and your devastated land -- surely now you will be too narrow for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children born in the time of your bereavement will yet say in your ears: 'The place is too narrow for me; make room for me to dwell in.' Then you will say in your heart: 'Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; whence then have these come?'"

Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame."

Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? Surely, thus says the LORD: "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

Thus says the LORD: "Where is your mother's bill of divorce, with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away."

Responsorial. *cfr. Is. 49: 15; cfr. 26: 10*

R: Can a woman forget her baby, and not feel pity for the son of her womb?

* Even if a woman forgets, I will never forget you, says the Lord.

V: My father and my mother have abandoned me, but the Lord has picked me up.

R: Even if a woman forgets, I will never forget you says the Lord.

Second Reading. *Bk. 1, 46- 55*

Magnificat.

A reading from the "Commentary on St. Luke" of St. Bede the Venerable, presbyter.

‘Mary said: My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour’.

The Lord, she said, has exalted me with a great and unheard of gift, which cannot be explained in any words and can scarcely be understood by the deepest feelings of the heart. And so I offer up all the strength of my soul in thanksgiving and praise. In my joy I pour out all my life, all my feeling, all my understanding in contemplating the greatness of him who is without end. My spirit rejoices in the eternal divinity of Jesus, my Saviour, whom I have conceived in time and bear in my body.

‘For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name’.

Mary looks back to the beginning of the canticle, to the words: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord’. Only the soul for whom the Lord does great things can glorify and praise him as he deserves; only that soul can call on those who share the same desire and intent: ‘Glorify the Lord with me. Together let us praise his name’.

The man who refuses to glorify with all his power the Lord whom he knows, and to keep his name holy, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. God’s name is called holy because he transcends the whole of creation by the loftiness of his unparalleled power, and because he is set apart from all those things which he has made.

‘He has lifted up Israel, his child, remembering his mercy’.

In beautiful fashion Mary calls Israel the child of the Lord, for Israel has been lifted up by him to be saved, seeing that Israel was obedient and humble, in accordance with the words of Hosea: ‘Because Israel was a child, I loved him’.

Now anyone who refuses to humble himself simply cannot be saved, nor can he say with the prophet: ‘Behold, the Lord is my helper; it is God who lifts up my life’. But whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

‘As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever’.

Mary does not mean the natural but the spiritual posterity of Abraham; that is, not those who have only descended from him physically, but those who follow in the steps of his faith, whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised. For he too believed while uncircumcised and it was considered as justifying him.

The coming of a Saviour therefore was promised to Abraham and to his posterity forever, that is, to the children of the promise, to whom was addressed the words: ' If you belong to Christ, then you are the posterity of Abraham, the heirs he was promised'.

It was right that the mothers of both the Lord and John should anticipate the birth of their children in prophecy. Just as sin began from women, so too it was fitting that blessings should spring from women, and that life which was lost through the deception of one woman, should be given back to the world by these two women who rival each other in giving praise.

Responsorial. *Lk. 1: 48 – 50*

R: All generations will call me blessed: great things has the Almighty done for me: * Holy is his name.

V: From generation to generation his mercy is on those who fear him:

R: Holy is his name.

Gospel. *Lk. 1: 46 – 55*

Great things has the Almighty done in me.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever."

23 DECEMBER

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 43: 18 – 28*

The Liberation of Israel.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

The wild beasts, the jackals and the ostriches will honour me; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

"Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel! You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honoured me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, or wearied you with frankincense. You have not bought me sweet cane with money, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices.

But you have burdened me with your sins, you have wearied me with your iniquities. "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Put me in remembrance, let us argue together; set forth your case, that you may be proved right. Your first father sinned, and your mediators transgressed against me. Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary, I delivered Jacob to utter destruction and Israel to reviling.

Responsorial. *Is. 43: 19; Jn. 1: 29*

R: Behold, I make a new thing; exactly now he will spring up, don't you realise it? * I, I will cancel your misdeeds, out of regard for myself I will not remember anymore your sins.

V: Behold the Lamb of God, behold he who takes away the sin of the world!

R: I, I will cancel your misdeeds, out of regard for myself I will not remember anymore your sins.

Second Reading. Ps. 84

He who was born once from Mary is born everyday in us.

A reading from the “Treatise on the psalms” of St. Jerome, presbyter.

“Mercy and truth will meet, justice and peace will kiss” (Ps. 84: 11). What an excellent friendship! Mercy and truth have met. Are you a sinner? Listen to what he says: “mercy”. Are you holy? Listen to what he says: “truth”. If you are a sinner, do not despair; if you are just, don’t become proud.

Let us interpret it in another way.

Two are the people of believers: one comes from paganism, the other from Judaism. To the Jews was promised that the Saviour would come: to us, who were strangers to the Law of God, it was not promised. Mercy therefore is for the pagans, truth is in the Jewish people, because the promise became reality, and this, which was foretold to the fathers, received its fulfilment in the children.

Justice and peace will kiss. What does this kiss between justice and peace mean? The same thing said above about mercy and truth. To say mercy is to say peace, and truth is the same thing as justice. If something is related to peace, it is also related to mercy, and that which has a connection with truth has a connection also with justice. Therefore: justice and peace will kiss means that mercy and truth will conclude a friendship: the people of the pagans and those of the Jews have become only one people, under only one Shepherd; Christ.

“Truth will spring up from the earth” (Ps. 84: 12) and “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14: 6). Therefore he who said: I am the truth, has sprung up from the earth. “A shoot will sprout from the stock of Jesse, a shoot will grow from his roots” (Is. 11: 1). And in another text: “God has worked salvation in our land” (Ps. 73: 12). Behold: the Truth, the Saviour, has sprung up from the earth, that is from Mary.

“And justice will appear from heaven” (Ps. 84: 12). It was right that the Saviour should have compassion on his people. Listen: “How impenetrable are his judgements, and inaccessible his ways!” (Rm. 11: 33).

“Truth will grow up from the earth”: he is the Saviour. “Justice will appear from heaven”. The justice is again the Saviour. How has he grown up from the earth? And how has he appeared from heaven?

He has grown up from the earth, by being born as a man; he has appeared from heaven, because God is always in the heavens. That is: he is born, yes, from the earth, but he who is born from the earth is always in heaven. He has appeared on earth without leaving heaven: because God is everywhere.

He has appeared: while we were sinning he turned away from us his gaze. That which he says is true. It is just that the potter loves his work, and the shepherd has compassion on his flock. We are his people, we are his creatures. For this he has grown up from the earth and has appeared from heaven: in order to fulfil all justice, and to have compassion on his work. And so that you may know that justice does not mean cruelty but mercy, listen again: The Lord will lavish his goods” (Ps. 84: 13). For this he will appear from heaven: in order to use mercy on his creatures.

“And our land will give its fruit” (Ps. 84: 13). Here he speaks of what will happen. Do not despair because of the fact that only once he was born from Mary: every day he is born in us.

“Our earth will give its fruit”. We also can generate Christ, if we want. “ And our earth will give its fruit”, with which that heavenly bread can be made, of which it is said: “I am the living bread, descended from heaven”(Jn. 6: 51).

Responsorial. *Ps. 84: 11, 13; cfr. Is. 2: 3*

R: Mercy and truth will meet: justice and peace will kiss. * The Lord will lavish his goods, and our land will give its fruit.

V: He will indicate his ways to us, and we will walk on his paths.

R: The Lord will lavish his goods, and our land will give its fruit.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 51: 1 – 11*

Promise of salvation to the believers, sons of Abraham.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

"Hearken to me, you who pursue deliverance, you who seek the LORD; look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug up. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who

bore you; for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many.

For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

"Listen to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go forth from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. My deliverance draws near speedily, my salvation has gone forth, and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

"Hearken to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear not the reproach of men, and be not dismayed at their reviling. For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my deliverance will be for ever, and my salvation to all generations."

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who did cut Rahab in pieces, that did pierce the dragon? Was it not you that did dry up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that did make the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Responsorial. *cfr. Is. 51: 4; 35: 10*

R: My people, pay attention; listen to me, o nations: * my Just One is already near, the Saviour comes.

V: The liberated of the Lord will return, they will come to Sion with songs of joy:

R: my Just One is already near, the Saviour comes.

Second Reading. *Cc. 9 – 12*

Revelation of the invisible God.

A reading from the treatise “Against Noetus” of St. Hippolytus, presbyter.

There is, brethren, one God, the knowledge of whom we gain from the Holy Scriptures, and from no other source. For just as a man, if he wishes to be skilled in the wisdom of this world, will find himself unable to get at it in any other way than by mastering the dogmas of philosophers, so all of us who wish to practice piety will be unable to learn its practice from any other quarter than the oracles of God. Whatever things, then, the Holy Scriptures declare, at these let us look; and whatsoever things they teach, these let us learn; and as the Father wills our belief to be, let us believe; and as He wills the Son to be glorified, let us glorify Him; and as He wills the Holy Spirit to be bestowed, let us receive Him. Not according to our own will, nor according to our own mind, nor yet as using violently those things which are given by God, but even as He has chosen to teach them by the Holy Scriptures, so let us discern them.

God, subsisting alone, and having nothing contemporaneous with Himself, determined to create the world. And conceiving the world in mind, and willing and uttering the word, He made it; and straightway it appeared, formed as it had pleased Him. For us, then, it is sufficient simply to know that there was nothing contemporaneous with God. Beside Him there was nothing; but He, while existing alone, yet existed in plurality. For He was neither without reason, nor wisdom, nor power, nor counsel. And all things were in Him, and He was the All. When He willed, and as He willed, He manifested His word in the times determined by Him, and by Him He made all things.

He begat the Word; and as He bears this Word in Himself, and that, too, as (yet) invisible to the world which is created, He makes Him visible; (and) uttering the voice first, and begetting Him as Light of Light, He set Him forth to the world as its Lord, (and) His own mind; and whereas He was visible formerly to Himself alone, and invisible to the world which is made, He makes Him visible in order that the world might see Him in His manifestation, and be capable of being saved.

And thus there appeared another beside Himself. But when I say another, I do not mean that there are two Gods, but that it is only as light of light, or as water from a fountain, or as a ray from the sun. For there is but

one power, which is from the All; and the Father is the All, from whom comes this Power, the Word. And this is the mind that came forth into the world, and was manifested as the Son of God. All things, then, are by Him, and He alone is of the Father. And He gave the law and the prophets; and in giving them, He made them speak by the Holy Spirit, in order that, being gifted with the inspiration of the Father's power, they might declare the Father's counsel and will.

Thus, then, was the Word made manifest, even as the blessed John says. For he sums up the things that were said by the prophets, and shows that this is the Word, by whom all things were made. For he speaks to this effect: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made." And beneath He says, "The world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not; He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

Responsorial. *cfr. Is. 9: 5, 6; Jn. 1: 4*

R: A child will be born for us, and he will be called powerful God. * He will reign on the throne of his father David, and great will be his dominion.

V: In him was the life, and the life was the light of men.

R: He will reign on the throne of his father David, and great will be his dominion.

Gospel. *Lk. 1: 57 – 66*

The birth of John the Baptist.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

Now the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. And her neighbours and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they would have named him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said, "Not so; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your kindred is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, "His name is John." And they all marvelled.

And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbours. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea; and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

24 DECEMBER

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 44: 1 – 8. 21 – 23*

Regeneration of Israel.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

"But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshu'run whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring. They shall spring up like grass amid waters, like willows by flowing streams.

This one will say, 'I am the Lord's,' another will call himself by the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, 'The Lord's,' and surname himself by the name of Israel."

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it, let him declare and set it forth before me.

Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any."

Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.

Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel.

Responsorial. *Is. 40: 9*

R: Climb on to a high mountain, you who bring good news to Sion; * announce to the cities of Judah: Behold your God.

V: Raise your voice with strength, you who bring good news to Jerusalem.

R: Announce to the cities of Judah: Behold your God.

Second Reading. *Bk. 3, t.4*

Every man will see the salvation of God.

A reading from the “Commentary on the prophet Isaiah” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

The prophet has sung the redemption of Israel, the forgiveness conceded to Jerusalem for her faults, and has asked for consolation for her; the time of consolation, so near is already almost present, behold, it arises: our Saviour comes! His way is prepared by the Precursor sent by God, the Baptist who in the desert of Judah shouts and says: “Prepare the way of the Lord, straighten his paths!” (Mt. 3: 3). Zechariah, the father of John also had a presentiment when he predicted: “And you, little child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will go before the Lord to prepare his paths” (Lk. 1: 76).

Of him the Saviour himself says: “He was a lamp that burnt and shone, and you have wanted to rejoice in his light only for a moment” (Jn. 5: 35). But the Sun of justice and the true Light is Christ.

The Sacred Scriptures make a comparison between the Baptist and a lamp. If we look at the divine and ineffable light, at his mysterious and limitless splendour, the small measure of the human mind can compare him justly to a lamp, even if he is rich with light and wisdom. What does it mean then: “Prepare the way of the Lord, straighten his paths” (Lk. 3: 4). He explains: “Every ravine will be filled up, every mountain and every hill will be lowered, the twisting paths will be made straight; the inaccessible places will be cleared” (Lk. 3: 5).

There are public roads and paths that are little practicable, but steep and almost inaccessible, in a way that one is obliged to climb over mountains and hills or sometimes to descend, now they border on the precipice, now they force one to climb to considerable heights. If these high and steep places are lowered, and the profound cavities are filled up, then from every part the irregular heights will be levelled, and the steep heights will become plains and the roads easily practicable.

This is what the power of our Lord did in a spiritual sense. When he became man and flesh, as the Scripture says, in his flesh he destroyed sin and has overthrown principalities and powers, the dominators of this world:

for us he levelled the road of love, free and suitable to the course, without descents nor slopes, without valleys nor desert tracts, but all plains.

The twisted paths have become straight: “Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed” (Is. 40: 5) and “every man will see the salvation of God” (Lk. 3: 6). He was and is the Only Begotten Word of God, that is the living God generated mysteriously by God the Father, in his divine majesty, “above every principality and authority, every power and domination and of every other name that can be nominated not only in the present age, but also in the future one” (Ep. 1: 21). He is the Lord of glory, and we have known his glory, even if once we did not know it, when, made man like us according to the divine plan, he affirmed to be equal to God the Father in power, in works, in glory, governing all things with his powerful word, accomplishing miracles with ease, commanding creation, resurrecting the dead, and operating without fatigue other prodigies.

In this way was the glory of the Lord revealed, and all men admire the salvation of God, of the Father, who has sent his Son to us from heaven, as Saviour and Redeemer.

Responsorial. *2 Chr. 20: 17*

R: Be persevering: you will see the salvation that the Lord will work for you. O Judah and Jerusalem, do not fear: * tomorrow you will go out: the Lord will be with you.

V: Purify yourselves, sons of Israel, says the Lord, and hold yourselves ready:

R: Tomorrow you will go out: the Lord will be with you.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 51: 17 – 52: 2. 7 – 10*

Salvation is announced to Jerusalem.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Rouse yourself, rouse yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering. There is none to guide her among all the sons she has borne; there is none to take her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up.

These two things have befallen you -- who will condole with you? -- devastation and destruction, famine and sword; who will comfort you? Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of the LORD, the rebuke of your God.

Therefore hear this, you who are afflicted, who are drunk, but not with wine: Thus says your Lord, the LORD, your God who pleads the cause of his people: "Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more; and I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have said to you, 'Bow down, that we may pass over'; and you have made your back like the ground and like the street for them to pass over."

Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake yourself from the dust, arise, O captive Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice, together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion.

Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. [Is 52:10] The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Responsorial. *cfr. EX. 19: 10 – 11; Dt. 7: 15; Dn. 9: 24*

R: Sanctify yourselves, people of God: tomorrow the Lord will come; * he will remove from you all weakness.

V: Your fault will be destroyed, and the Saviour of the world will reign over you:

R: he will remove from you all weakness.

Second Reading. *Disc. 185*

The truth has sprung up from the earth, and justice has shown itself from heaven.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Augustine, bishop.

Wake up, O man – it was for you that God was made man! Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. For you, I say, was God made man. Eternal death would have awaited you had he not been born in time. Never would you be freed from your sinful flesh, had he not taken to himself the likeness of sinful flesh. Everlasting would be your misery, had he not performed this act of mercy. You would not have come to life again, had he not come to die your death. You would have broken down, had he not come to help you. You would have perished, had he not come.

Let us joyfully celebrate the coming of our salvation and redemption. Let us celebrate the hallowed day on which the great eternal day came from the great eternal day into this, our so short and temporal day. He has become our justice, and our sanctification, and our redemption. And so, as scripture says: ‘Let him who glories, glory in the Lord’.

Truth, then, is sprung out of the earth: Christ who said, ‘I am the truth’, is born of a virgin. And justice looked down from heaven: man, believing in him who has been born, has been justified not by himself, but by God.

Truth is sprung out of the earth – flesh born of Mary. And justice looked down from heaven, for a man cannot receive anything, unless it is given him from heaven.

Being justified by faith, let us have peace with God, for justice and peace have kissed each other, through our Lord Jesus Christ, for truth is sprung out of the earth. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we glory in our hope of sharing the glory of God. Saint Paul does not say, ‘our glory’, but ‘the glory of God’; because justice does not proceed from us, but has looked down from heaven. Let him who glories then, glory, not in himself, but in the Lord. Because of this, when the

Lord was born of the virgin, the angels announced, 'Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will'.

Whence is peace on earth, if not from the fact that Truth is sprung out of the earth, that is, Christ is born of flesh? And he is our peace, who has made both one, that we might be men of good will, bound together by the sweet bonds of unity.

Let us, then, rejoice in this grace, that our glory may be the testimony of our conscience, and we may glory, not in ourselves, but in the Lord. Obviously, it was because of this that it was said, 'my glory, who lifts up my head'. For what greater grace could have dawned upon us from God, than that he, who had only one Son, made him the Son of man, and so in turn made the son of man a son of God. Ask yourself whether this involved any merit, any motivation, any right on your part; and see whether you find anything but grace!

Responsorial. *Is. 11: 1, 5, 2*

R: A shoot will spring from the stock of Jesse, a shoot will grow from his roots: he is girded with justice, * faithfulness covers him like a cloak.

V: On him the Spirit of the Lord will rest: spirit of wisdom and of intelligence, spirit of council and of strength;

R: faithfulness covers him like a cloak.

Gospel. *Lk. 1: 67 – 79*

A sun that rises will come to visit you from on high.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."