

**CHRISTMAS TIME**

**25<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER**

# **BIRTH OF THE LORD**

## **SOLEMNITY**

CYCLES 1 and 2

**First Reading.** *Is. 9: 1 – 7*

*The liberation.*

**A reading from the prophet Isaiah.**

But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zeb'ulun and the land of Naph'tali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Mid'ian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

**Responsorial.** *cfr. Lk. 1: 45*

**R:** Blessed is Mary, the mother of God, whose womb has remained intact: \* today she has generated the Saviour of the world.

**V:** Blessed is she who has believed in the fulfilment of the words of the Lord.

**R:** today she has generated the Saviour of the world.

Or.

**First Reading.** *Is. 11: 1 – 10*

*The root of Jesse and the messianic peace.*

**A reading from the prophet Isaiah.**

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.

**Responsorial.** *Lk. 2: 14*

**R.** Today the king of heaven is born for us from the Virgin to lead the man who is lost back to the kingdom of heaven: \* the hosts of angels rejoice, because the eternal salvation has been manifested to men.

**V:** Glory to God in the highest of heavens, and peace on earth to all men whom he loves.

**R:** The hosts of angels rejoice, because the eternal salvation has been manifested to men.

Or.

**First Reading. Is. 40: 1 – 8**

*Announcement of liberation.*

**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.

**Responsorial. cfr. Lk. 1: 48**

**R:** Blessed are the descendants from which the Christ is born! \* Glory to the Virgin who has generated the King of heaven!

**V:** All peoples will call you blessed, O holy Virgin Mary!

**R:** Glory to the Virgin who has generated the King of heaven!

Or

**First Reading. Is. 52: 1 – 6**

*Liberation of Jerusalem.*

**A reading from the prophet Isaiah.**

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.

For thus says the LORD: "You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.

For thus says the Lord GOD: My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. Now therefore what have I here, says the LORD, seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail, says the LORD, and continually all the day my name is despised.

Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I."

### **Responsorial.**

**R:** True God, generated by the Father, the Word descended from heaven into the womb of the Virgin, in order to make himself visible to us, clothed with the same flesh of the old Adam: \* from the inviolate threshold he entered into history, God is man, light and life, the creator of the world.

**V:** As a bridegroom who comes out from the bridal chamber.

**R:** From the inviolate threshold he entered into history, God is man, light and life, the creator of the world.

### **Second Reading.** *Disc. 1 for Christmas, 1- 3*

*Recognise, Christian, your dignity.*

### **A reading from the "Discourses" of St. Leo the Great, pope.**

Our Saviour, dearly beloved, was born today: let us be glad. For there is no proper place for sadness, when we keep the birthday of the Life, which destroys the fear of mortality and brings to us the joy of promised eternity. No one is kept from sharing in this happiness. There is for all one common measure of joy, because as our LORD the destroyer of sin and death finds none free from guilt, so He comes to free us all. Let the saint exult in that he draws near to victory. Let the sinner be glad in that he is invited to pardon. Let the gentile take courage in that he is called to life.

For the Son of GOD in the fullness of time which the inscrutable depth of the Divine counsel has determined, has taken on him the nature of man, thereby to reconcile it to its Author: in order that the inventor of death, the devil, might be conquered through that (nature) which he had conquered. Therefore the exulting angel's song when the LORD was born is this, "Glory to GOD in the Highest," and their message, "peace on earth to men

that he loves.” For they see that the heavenly Jerusalem is being built up out of all the nations of the world: and over that indescribable work of the Divine love how ought the humbleness of men to rejoice, when the joy of the lofty angels is so great? Let us then, dearly beloved, give thanks to GOD the Father, through His Son, in the Holy Spirit, Who “for His great mercy, wherewith He has loved us,” has had pity on us: and “when we were dead in sins, has revived us together in Christ,” that we might be in Him a new creation and a new work of his hands.

Let us put off then the old man with his deeds: and having obtained a share in the birth of Christ let us renounce the works of the flesh. Christian, acknowledge your dignity, and becoming a partner in the Divine nature, refuse to return to the old baseness by degenerate conduct. Remember the Head and the Body of which you are a member. Recollect that you were rescued from the power of darkness and brought out into God’s light and kingdom. By the mystery of Baptism you were made the temple of the Holy Ghost: do not put such an illustrious guest to flight from you by base acts, and subject yourself once more to the slavery of the devil. Because your purchase money is the blood of Christ, because He shall judge you in truth who ransomed you in mercy, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit reigns forever and ever. Amen.

### **Responsorial.**

**R:** Today true peace has descended from heaven for us; \* today on the whole earth the heavens drip sweetness.

**V:** The day of a new redemption shines out for us, a day prepared from before the ages, joy without end.

**R:** Today on the whole earth the heavens drip sweetness.

Or

**Second Reading.** *Disc. 149*

*The name of Christ is peace.*

**A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Peter Chrysologus, bishop.**

When the Lord, our Saviour, came, at his first appearance in the flesh, the angel, united with the heavenly choirs, gave the announcement to the

shepherds saying: “I announce to you a great joy that will be for all the people” (Lk. 2: 10)

Today in fact the Church is in peace; today the ship of the Church has reached the port; today my dearest, the people of Christ are exalted, while the enemies of the truth are humiliated; today Christ is in joy and the devil in mourning; today the angels exult, the demons are dispersed. What more can be said? Today Christ, king of peace, at his appearing has removed every contrast and, like the splendour of the sun illuminates the heaven, in the same way he illuminates the Church with the brightness of peace. Because “today a Saviour is born for you” (Lk. 2: 11).

O how desirable is the peace, stable foundation of the Christian religion and heavenly ornament of the altar of the Lord! What can we say that would be worthy of this peace? The name of Christ himself is Peace. The Apostle says: “Christ is our peace, he who has made of the two only one people” (Ep. 2: 14).

But, as for the visit of a sovereign the squares are cleared and all the city is a feast of flowers and lights so that nothing can appear less worthy of the presence of the king, so also now, at the arrival of Christ, king of peace, may all sadness be removed and, at the splendour of the truth, may lies disappear, discord being dissolved, may charity shine forth.

And if also on earth the saints exalt the peace, the splendour of his praise abounds in the highest heavens; the angels sing: “Glory to God in the highest of heavens and peace on earth to the men that he loves” (Lk. 2: 14).

Do you see, brothers, how all the creatures from the heavens and from the earth exchange among themselves the gift of peace; the angels from heaven announce peace to the earth, all the saints together on the earth praise Christ, our peace, raised up among the angels, and the mystical choirs sing: “Hosanna in the highest heavens”:

Let us also say together with the angels: Glory to God, who has humiliated the devil and exalted his Christ; glory to God who has destroyed discord and has re-established peace.

### **Responsorial.**

**R:** Today true peace has come down from heaven for us; \* today the heavens drip sweetness on the earth.

**V:** The day of a new redemption shines out for us, day prepared before the ages, joy without end.

**R:** Today the heavens drip sweetness on the earth.

Or

**Second Reading.** *Disc. 8 on the Birth of the Lord*

*In the Nativity of Christ the divinity humiliates itself. Humanity is raised up.*

**A reading from the “Discourses” of Ivo of Chatres, bishop.**

This immaculate lamb is not that one who in the ancient sacrifice was chosen from a flock without stain: but the true and innocent lamb, born from the immaculate womb of the Virgin. This lamb without stain and without wrinkle, unites a virgin to himself as bride, he who before, being born, had sanctified a virgin rendering her mother. For this the birth of Christ in time is not different from the birth of a Christian in the spirit.

As in fact the mother of Christ, conceived as a virgin, gave birth as a virgin, and remained a virgin, so also the mother Church the bride of Christ every day generates the Christian people by means of water and of the word and remains virgin. In the Mother of God we admire the integrity of the flesh, in the Church the pureness of the faith. Let us listen to Paul, friend of the bridegroom, who burnt with chaste jealousy for the bride and not certainly for himself but for the Bridegroom. He says to the Church of Corinth: “I feel a type of divine jealousy for you, having promised you to a unique bridegroom, in order to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11: 2).

Engaged to him down here with a pledge of the spirit in the integrity of the faith and in the pureness of the customs, this faithful virgin has to be led from hope to hope, in order to arrive to enjoy totally, in the fullness of joy, the love of the Bridegroom, whom she has followed despising all the seductions of the serpent. Let us listen now in what way he had sanctified his mother in the flesh, and let us exult. He cancelled in her every stain of sin, both original and actual and, assuming flesh, he changed it into divine purity. In fact the Scriptures says: “Our God is a devouring fire” (Heb. 12:



29). Like the material fire, purifies everything that it runs over, and transforms it in itself, so also the humanity of our flesh, assumed by the divine fire, could not be a participant of his divinity until it began to have through grace that which God is by nature.

The first mother of the human race, seduced by the temptation of the serpent, was subjected to a double curse: to die, and with her also man, and to give birth in pain to the children conceived in pleasure. All the children of Eve were involved in this curse and generated their children marked by the condemnation of death. Only this mother, who did not believe in the suggestions of the devil, but in the word of the angel, merited to hear the blessing that annulled the double curse: “Blessed are you among women” (Lk. 1: 42), because she did not conceive in the concupiscence of the flesh nor did she give birth in pain: “and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk. 1: 42), the same son who was born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man” (Jn. 1: 13), entered into time without being constrained, but of his own free choice and freed us from eternal death. In the birth of Christ, God was born as man so that men could be reborn as gods. The divinity humiliated itself so that humanity could be lifted up.

**Responsorial.** *cfr. Lk. 2: 15 – 16*

**R:** O great mystery, marvellous event, that the creatures see the Creator born and placed in a manger. \*Blessed is the Virgin who was made worthy of receiving Christ the Lord in her womb.

**V:** The shepherds hurried with joy to see that which they heard and were worthy to find immediately the Lord for whom they were searching.

**R:** Blessed is the Virgin who was made worthy of receiving Christ the Lord in her womb.

Or

**Second Reading.** *C. 9. 226*

*The peace that comes to us from the Lord will have no end.*

**A reading from the “Commentary on the prophet Isaiah” of St. Basil the Great, pope.**

“A baby is born for us, a son has been given to us. On his shoulder is the sign of his sovereignty. And he is called Wonderful Counsellor” (Is. 9:

5). All the names of the Lord that we know we have heard from heaven. “Behold the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son, whom she will call Emmanuel” (Is. 7: 14). This will be his name: wonderful councillor; and so is he who reveals to us the great mystery hidden for ages, that has never been revealed to other generations. He announces and reveals his impenetrable riches to the nations, so that they can become co-heirs and only one body with him, on whose shoulders is the sign of his sovereignty, which is the kingdom and the power, on the cross. In fact, lifted up on the cross, he draws everyone to himself.

“His dominion will be great and peace will have no end” (Is. 9: 6). It appears clearly that this was said in the person of the Father. Because the Son, with the blood shed on the cross, spread his peace over the earth and in heaven. He also said: I will bring peace on the princes and salvation to him. I think that these words reveal the mystery of the resurrection. Because, in fact, “he was crucified because of his weakness, but lives by the power of God” (2 Cor. 13: 4), in that sense it is said of him that he has brought salvation, to cure the infirmity of the flesh that he assumed for us.

“And his peace will have no end” (Is. 9: 6). “I give you – he says – peace; not like the world gives I give to you” (Jn. 14: 27). His peace will have no end exactly because it is a gift that surpasses the limits of the world. If it were to have origin from it, it would not be able to last beyond this world.

He, in fact, who now receives and conserves his peace, will transform his life in an eternity of joy and peace. The peace of Solomon was circumscribed in a determinate number of years; the peace that comes from the Lord lasts for eternity, because it is not circumscribed by any limit. Everything will be subjected, all things will recognise his dominion; silence will be imposed on those who, devoid of peace, stir up discord, where God will be all in all, everyone will unanimously praise the Lord.

“On the throne of David and on the kingdom that he comes to consolidate and to strengthen with justice and right” (Is. 9: 6). “Your judgements, he says, are a great abyss; and your justice like the mountains of God” (Ps. 35: 7). His judgements cannot be understood, and the sublimity of his justice is unreachable by human contemplation. “And the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this” (Is. 9: 7). He who surrounded us with jealous love even when because of our ignorance we were going into

perdition, now, will involve our humanity, in the plan of salvation, in order to re-integrate us into his kingdom.

**Responsorial.** *Lk. 2: 14*

**R:** Today the king of heaven is born for us from the Virgin in order to bring back the man, who was lost, to the kingdom of heaven: \* the hosts of angels rejoice, because the eternal salvation has been manifested to men.

**V:** Glory to God in the highest of heavens, and peace on earth to the men that he loves.

**R:** The hosts of angels rejoice, because the eternal salvation has been manifested to men.

YEARS A B C

**Gospel of the Vigil.** *Mt. 1: 1 – 25*

**Beginning of 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.

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. Disc. 145**

*Behold the Virgin will conceive and will give birth to a Son whom she will call Emmanuel.*

### **A reading from the "Discourses" of St. Peter Chrysologus, bishop.**

I will speak to you today, brothers, of what the blessed evangelist has referred to us on the mystery of the birth of Christ. "This – he says – is how it came about: his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they could go to live together, she was found to be with child by the work of the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, who was a just man and did not want to

repudiate her, decided to send her away in secret” (Mt. 1: 18 – 19). How could he be called “just” who did not want to discuss about the conception of his bride? The virtues, if we separate them from one another, cease to be virtues: if there is equity without goodness, one becomes unforgiving and justice without mercy becomes cruelty. Joseph therefore was truly just, because he was also good, and good because just. He wanted to be good, and therefore he was not cruel; he judged with benevolence and therefore observed justice; he did not want to make himself a judge and therefore he abstained from judgement. The just soul burnt under the blows of the newness of the event: in front of him he contemplated his wife pregnant but virgin; none the less full of the gift of decency; he was anxious for the fruit but certain of her integrity; dressed with maternity as much as with virginal dignity.

In front of such a situation, what could a husband do? Accuse her of unfaithfulness? But it was exactly he who was a witness of her innocence. Proclaim her fault? But it was he who was the guardian of her decency. Contest her for adultery? But he himself was the defender of her virginity! What was he to do in front of all this? He thinks of sending her away, seeing that it was not possible to speak of all that had happened, and neither could he contain it inside himself. He thinks of sending her away, and he speaks only to God, because he cannot confide in any man.

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary, your bride, with you, because that which is generated in her comes from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you will call him Jesus: he in fact will save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1: 20 – 21). Note, brothers, that in the person of Joseph is indicated all the generations, all the family, all the descendants of David.

Joseph, son of David. Born after twenty-seven generations, in what sense is he said to be the son of David, if not because in him is revealed the mystery of a descendant, a promise is fulfilled, the heavenly conception of a divine baby in the womb of a virgin is sealed? The promise of God the Father was expressed to David with these words: “The Lord has sworn to David and he will not withdraw his word: the fruit of your loins will I put on your throne” (Ps. 131: 11). Yes, exactly the fruit of your loins, the fruit of your womb, because the Divine Guest descended from heaven into the dwelling of flesh, without however letting himself be closed by the limits of a body and he came out without opening the virginal womb; in this way was

fulfilled that which we read in the song of Songs: “You are a closed Garden, my sister, bride, closed garden, sealed fountain” (S. of Songs 4: 12).

“That which is generated in her comes from the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 1: 20). She conceives a virgin, but from the Holy Spirit; she gives birth a virgin, but He whom Isaiah had foretold: “Behold the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a Son, whom she will call Emmanuel” which means “God-with-us” (Is. 7: 14; Mt, 1: 23).

**Responsorial.**

**R:** Blessed are the descendants from whom the Christ is born. \* Glory to the Virgin who has generated the King of heaven.

**V:** All the nations will call you blessed, O holy Virgin Mary!

**R:** Glory to the Virgin who has generated the King of Heaven.

Or

**Gospel of the Night. *Lk. 2: 1 – 14***

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying

in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

**Third Reading.** *Disc. 2 for Christmas.*

*Today a Saviour has been born for us.*

**A reading from the "Discourses" of St. Aelred, abbot.**

"Today in the city of David a Saviour is born for us, He is Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2: 11). This city is Bethlehem and it is there that we must hasten, as the shepherds did as soon as they heard the announcement. "And this will be for you the sign: you will find the baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger" (Lk. 2: 12).

It is for this that I told you that you have to love him: fear the Lord of the angels, but love him in the tender baby; fear the Lord of the powers, but love him wrapped in swaddling clothes; fear the king of heaven, but love him who is laid in a manger. What sign did the shepherds receive? "You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, who lies in a manger". He is the Saviour, he is the Lord: is it then an extraordinary thing to be wrapped in swaddling clothes, to lie in a manger? Are not even the other babies wrapped in swaddling clothes? What sign is this? Certainly great, if only we manage to understand it. And we can, if we do not limit ourselves to listening to this message of love, but also welcome into our hearts the light that appears with the angels. It shone as soon as this announcement was given, in order to teach us that only those who welcome the light of heaven in their hearts truly listen.

There would be many things to say on this mystery; but the time has passed, therefore I will say briefly only a little more. Bethlehem, "house of the bread" is the holy Church, in which the body of Christ, the true bread, is distributed. The manger of Bethlehem is the altar in the Church. Here the creatures of Christ are nourished. Of this table it is written: "You have prepared a table in front of me" (Ps. 22: 5). In this manger there is Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes. The swaddling clothes are the veil of the sacrament. Here under the species of the bread and wine, there is the body and blood of Christ. We believe that the true Christ is there in this sacrament, but wrapped in swaddling clothes, that is invisible. We do not

have any sign that is so great and evident of the nativity of Christ as the body that we eat and the blood that we drink every day when we draw near to the altar: every day we see, he who was born only once for us from the Virgin Mary, immolating himself. Let us hasten therefore, brothers, to this crib of the Lord; but first as much as it is possible for us, let us prepare ourselves with his grace for this meeting, so that every day and in the whole of our life, “with a pure heart, honest conscience and sincere faith” (2. Cor. 6: 6) we can sing together with the angels: “Glory to God in the highest heavens and peace on earth to men that he loves” (Lk. 2: 14)

Through the same Christ our Lord, to whom be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

**Responsorial. 2: 10 – 12**

**R:** The angel said to the shepherds: I announce to you a great joy that will be for all the people: \* Today in the city of David a Saviour is born for you, He is Christ the Lord.

**V:** You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

**R:** Today in the city of David a Saviour is born for you, He is Christ the Lord.

Or.

**Gospel of the Dawn. Lk. 2: 15 – 20**

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.**

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



**Third Reading. T. 3: 1, 157 – 159**

*The Lord of all things came in the form of a servant.*

**A reading from the “Discourse on the day of the Nativity of the Saviour” of Theodotus of Ancira, bishop.**

The Lord of all things came in the form of a servant, dressed in poverty, so that the prey, becoming frightened, would not escape from him. He chose the uncertainty of an undefended field in which to be born, he was brought forth by a poor virgin, in the most absolute poverty, so that, in silence, he could go to hunt for men in order to save them. If he had been born in splendour and had been surrounded by great riches, the unbelievers would have said that the abundance of riches would have operated the transformation of the earth. If he had chosen Rome, the city that in that time was the most powerful, they would have believed that its power would have changed the world. If he had perhaps been the son of the emperor, they would have attributed the good done to power. If he had perhaps been the son of a legislator, they would have attributed it to his laws. What does he do instead? He chooses all that is poor and without any value, modest and the most obscure, so that it could be clear that only the Divinity has transformed the world. Exactly for this he chooses a poor mother, a country that is even poorer, and he himself makes himself very poor.

The crib tells us this: there being no bed in which he could be laid, the Lord is placed in a manger, and the destitution of the most indispensable things becomes the most credible proof of the preceding prophecies. He was placed in a manger in order to indicate that he came expressly in order to be food, offered to all, without exceptions. The Word, Son of God, choosing poverty and lying in a manger, draws to himself rich and poor, well educated and uneducated.

Do you see therefore how the destitution of every thing has fulfilled the prophecies, and the poverty has made him who made himself poor for us accessible to all. No one remained frightened in front of the great riches of Christ, no one stopped in front of the power of his dominion: he appeared as a man like all the others and, poor, he offered himself for the salvation of all.

By means of the assumed humanity, the Word of God, showed himself in a manger, so that to all rational and irrational beings could be opened the possibility of participating of the food of salvation. And I think that the

Prophet also alluded to this when he spoke of the mystery of this crib: “The ox knows its master and the ass the manger of its owner, but Israel does not know and my people does not understand” (Is. 1: 3).

He rich as he was made himself poor for us, making salvation easily perceptible to all by the strength of his divinity. Paul also alluded to this when he said: “From rich that he was he made himself poor for you, so that you could become rich through his poverty” (2 Cor. 8: 9).

But who was he who enriched? And whom did he enrich? And in what way did he make himself poor for us? Who therefore – tell me – though being rich, made himself poor out of regard for my poverty? He who appeared man? But this one never became rich: born of poor descendants, he remained always poor. How therefore was he rich and whom did he, who became poor for us, enrich? God – he says – enriches the creature. It is therefore God who makes himself poor, assuming the poverty of the human creature through whom he manifests himself: rich in his divinity, he made himself poor by assuming our humanity.

### **Responsorial.**

**R:** O King of heaven, to whom the entire world is subjected! He who upholds the world is placed in a stable, \* lies in a manger and thunders on the clouds.

**V:** He who holds together the heavens and the earth and governs the entire universe,

**R:** lies in a manger and thunders on the clouds.

Or

### **Gospel of the Day. *Jn. 1: 1 – 18***

#### **Beginning of the Gospel of St. John.**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him.

He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.'" And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

**Third Reading. Hom. 2: 6**

*The Word became flesh and came to live among us.*

**A reading from the "Homilies" of St. Basil the Great, bishop.**

God on the earth, God in the midst of men: not a God who hands over the law in the midst of flashes of fire and the sounds of trumpets on a smoking mountain, or in a dense cloud in the midst of lightening and thunder, sowing terror among those who were listening to him, but an incarnated God, who with gentleness and sweetness speaks to creatures who have his same nature. An incarnated God, who does not act from far away or by means of prophets, but through the humanity that he assumed as his own to clothe his person, in order to lead back to himself, in our same flesh made his, the entire human race. In what way, through only one man, does the splendour reach all? In what way does divinity reside inside flesh? Like fire in iron: not through transformation, but through participation. The fire, in fact does not pass into the iron, but remaining where it is, it communicates its virtue, nor does it diminish because of this communication, but pervades all that to which it communicates itself. So also the God-Word, without ever separating Himself from Himself, "comes to live in the midst of us"; without undergoing any change, "he became

flesh”: the heaven that contained him did not remain devoid of him while the earth welcomed him in her bosom.

Try to penetrate into the mystery: God assumed flesh exactly in order to destroy the death that was hidden in it. Like the antidotes of a poison, once swallowed, annul the effects of the poison, and as the darkness of a house dissolves in the light of the sun, so also death that dominated over human nature was destroyed by the presence of God. And as ice remains solid in water as long as the night lasts and darkness reigns, but promptly dissolves in the heat of the sun, so also death which had reigned until the coming of Christ, as soon as the grace of God the Saviour appeared and the sun of justice rose, “was swallowed up by victory” (1 Cor. 15: 54), not being able to co-exist with Life. O greatness of the goodness and of the love of God for men!

Let us give glory together to the shepherds; let us exult with the angels “because today a Saviour is born for us, he is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2: 11). To us also the Lord has not appeared in the form of God, which would have frightened our fragility, but in that of a servant, in order to give back freedom to those who were in slavery. Who is so lukewarm, who is so ungrateful that he does not rejoice, does not exult, does not bring gifts? Today is the feast of all the creatures. Let there be no one who does not offer something, no one who shows himself to be ungrateful. Let us also explode into a song of exultation.

**Responsorial.** *cfr. Lk. 2: 11*

**R:** Who have you seen, shepherds? Tell me, announce it to us, who has appeared on the earth? \*We have seen a Baby and hosts of angels who were praising the Saviour.

**V:** Today a Saviour is born for us in the city of David, He is Christ the Lord.

**R:** We have seen a Baby and hosts of angels who were praising the Saviour.