

1st JANUARY

MARY, MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

SOLEMNITY

CYCLES 1 and 2

First Reading. *Heb. 2: 9 – 17*

Christ has made himself similar to his brothers in everything.

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.

[Heb 2:9] But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.

[Heb 2:10] For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

[Heb 2:11] For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren,

[Heb 2:12] saying, "I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee."

[Heb 2:13] And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Here am I, and the children God has given me."

[Heb 2:14] Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

[Heb 2:15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

[Heb 2:16] For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham.

[Heb 2:17] Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people.

Responsorial. *Lk. 1: 28*

R: Blessed, O Virgin Mary: you have carried the Creator of the world. *
You have given life to Him who has created you, and you are virgin forever.

V: I greet you, O full of grace, the Lord is with you.

R: You have given life to Him who has created you, and you are virgin forever.

Or:

Responsorial. Lk. 1: 48

R: Rejoice with me all of you who love the Lord. * Because of my humble state the Most High has taken pleasure in me and from my womb I have generated God and man.

V: All the generations will call me blessed because he has looked on the humility of his handmaid.

R: Because of my humble state the Most High has taken pleasure in me and from my womb I have generated God and man.

Second Reading. A. Epitteto, 5 – 9

The Word has assumed the human nature from Mary.

A reading from the “Letters” of St. Athanasius, bishop.

The Word ‘took to himself descent from Abraham’, as the Apostle says, ‘and therefore it was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers’, and take a body similar to us. That is why Mary is really part of his plan, so that he may take this body from her and offer it up for us as something that is his own. Accordingly, scripture mentions his birth, and says: ‘She wrapped him up in swaddling clothes’; the breasts that suckled him were called blessed; sacrifice was offered because he was the first-born. Gabriel announced the good news to Mary with all clarity: he did not say simply: ‘what is born in you’, in case it might be thought that the body had been introduced into her from outside; he said: ‘what is born of you’, so that it would be accepted that what she gave birth to, came from her in the natural way.

The Word took this course of action so that he could take on himself what was ours, and offer it in sacrifice, and do away with it altogether, and then clothe us in what was his, as he inspired the Apostle to say: ‘This perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality’.

This was no mere fiction, as some have thought. Far from it! Our Saviour really did become man, and this brought about the salvation of the

whole man. Our salvation is no illusion, nor is it salvation of the body only: the salvation of the whole man, body and soul, was really brought about in the Word himself.

What was born of Mary, according to scripture, was by nature human; the Lord's body was a real one- real, because it was the same as ours. This was so because Mary was our sister, since we are all descended from Adam.

This is the meaning of John's words: 'The Word became flesh', as can be seen from a similar passage in Paul: 'Christ became a curse for us'. The human body has been greatly enhanced through the fellowship and the union of the Word with it. From being mortal, it has become immortal; though physical, it has become spiritual; though made from the earth, it has passed through the gates of heaven.

Though the Word took a body from Mary, the Trinity remains a Trinity, and admits neither addition nor diminution. It is always perfect. In the Trinity one Godhead is acknowledged, and so in the Church one God is proclaimed, the Father of the Word.

Responsorial. *Lk. 1: 42*

R: How can I sing your praises, holy Virgin Mary? * Heaven itself cannot contain the One whom you bore in your womb.

V: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

R: Heaven itself cannot contain the One whom you bore in your womb.

Or.

Second Reading. *Lett. 140, 6.11*

God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

A reading from the "Letters" of St. Augustine, bishop.

But when the fullness of time came, so that the grace that was hidden in the Old Testament could now be revealed in the New, "God sent his Son, born from a woman" (Gal. 4: 4). In the term "woman" the Hebrew language does not make distinction between virgin and married woman.

So that, then, you can see which Son he had sent and had wanted to be conceived by a woman, which God it is who had deigned to lower himself to such a humble state, for the salvation of men, consider now what the Gospel says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God

and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (Jn. 1: 1-2). This God therefore, Word of God, through whom everything was made, is the Son of God, unchangeable, omnipresent, not circumscribed, undivided, present everywhere, even in the minds of the wicked, even though they do not see him, exactly as the light of day shines out and is not noticed by the blind. He therefore shines out even in the midst of that darkness to which the Apostle alludes when he says: “If once you were darkness, now you are light in the Lord” (Ep. 5: 8). Thus God sent his Son, born from a woman, born under the law. He accepted the observation of the law “in order to ransom those who were under the law” (Gal. 4: 5); those, that is, whom the law held slaves of sin, because the letter killed as long as the precept was not fulfilled, before the coming of the Spirit to give it life. “The love of God”, that fulfils the law, “has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rm. 5: 5). After having said: In order to ransom those who were under the law, he immediately adds: “so that we could receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4: 5). This in order to distinguish the grace of this benefit from the nature of the Son who was sent to us, son not through adoption but through eternal generation; who became a participant of the nature of the sons of men in order that he could adopt them and make them participants of his nature. After having said: “I have given them power to become sons of God” (Jn. 1: 12), he wants to clarify in what way, because he did not want to intend a carnal birth. He gave this power “to those who believe in his name” and, through spiritual grace, are reborn “not from blood, nor from the will of the flesh, nor from the will of man but from God” (Jn. 1: 13) placing immediately in evidence the mystery of this reciprocity; and as if, amazed in front of so many benefits, that we did not dare to hope for, he immediately adds: “And the Word was made flesh, and came to live in the midst of us” (Jn. 1: 14). As if he was to say: Do not despair, o men, of being able to become sons of God, from the moment that the same Son of God, the Word of God, “became flesh and came to live in the midst of us”. You do the same, become spirit and live in him, who became flesh and lived among us. We must not despair anymore, we, sons of men, of being able to become through the participation of the Word sons of God, now that the Son of God, participating of our flesh, has become son of man.

Responsorial. *Ps. 18: 6; cfr. Ez. 44 : 2 – 3*

R: The true God descended from heaven, generated by the Father, he entered into the womb of the Virgin and clothed himself with human flesh, in order to manifest himself to us visibly. * And he came out from the closed door, man and God, light and life. Creator of the world.

V: Like a bridegroom, the Lord came out from his bridal chamber.

R: And he came out from the closed door, man and God, light and life. Creator of the world.

YEARS A B C

Gospel. *Lk. 2: 16 – 21*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

[Luke 2:16] And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

[Luke 2:17] And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child;

[Luke 2:18] and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

[Luke 2:19] But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.

[Luke 2:20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

[Luke 2:21] And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Third Reading. *Hom. 15: 1 –3*

The Holy Virgin has to be called Mother of God.

A reading from the “Homilies” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

Great, profound and truly stupendous is this mystery of the religion, on which the holy angels themselves desire to fix their gaze. In fact a disciple of the Lord, with regard to that which the holy prophets had foretold of

Christ the Saviour of the world, says: “It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things” (1 Pt. 1: 12). Those angels, in fact, penetrating with their intelligence this great divine mystery, when Christ appeared in the flesh, gave thanks for us singing: “Glory to God in the highest of heavens and peace on earth to the men whom he loves” (Lk. 2: 14).

He, though being by his nature true God, Word proceeding from God the Father, consubstantial and co eternal to the Father and sublime because of the splendour of his dignity, notwithstanding the identity of this his nature with that of the Father, “did not consider a jealous treasure his equality with God, but, assuming the condition of a servant “from the Virgin Mary” and becoming similar to men, he appeared in the form of a man, he humiliated himself making himself obedient unto death and to a death on the cross” (Phil. 2: 6 – 8). Thus he who of his fullness filled the world wanted to humiliate himself up to annihilation. He humiliated himself for us, without any constriction, assuming in fact freely the form of a servant for us, he who by nature was free; he made himself one of us, he who was above every creature, he made himself mortal, he from whom all things take life: he is in fact the living bread that gives life to the world (cfr. Jn. 6: 51, 33).

He submitted himself with us to the law, he who was above the law, on the contrary even the creator of the law, being God. He became like one of those whose life has a beginning, he who was before all ages, that is he who is the author and creator of the ages themselves.

In what way did he make himself similar to us? Assuming, in a truly prodigious way, a body from the holy Virgin; a body not without a soul, as some heretics affirm, but formed by a rational soul. Perfect man, therefore, born from a woman, without sin; true man, not simply an appearance, without however abdicating his divine nature, or ceasing to be that which he has always been, is and will be: true God. It is exactly for this reason that we say that the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God. As in fact St. Paul says: “Only one Father, from whom everything comes; and only one Lord Jesus Christ, in virtue of whom all things exist” (1 Cor. 8: 6), we absolutely cannot divide in two sons the unique God and Saviour, the Word of God incarnated and made man.

Responsorial. *Lk. 1: 42*

R: Blessed are you, O Virgin Mary, * you have carried Christ the Lord in your womb.

V: Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

R: You have carried Christ the Lord in your womb.

Or.

Third Reading. *Bk. 2, c. 6;1 – 2*

With great fear and reverence we must contemplate the mystery of Christ.

A reading from the “Beginnings” of Origen, presbyter.

If we consider that which the Sacred Scriptures tells us about his majesty and if we try to penetrate through contemplation that: “He is the image of the invisible God, generated before all other creatures, since through him all things have been created, those visible and invisible”; that “all things have been created through him and in view of him and he is before all and everything exists in him” (Col. 1: 15 – 17) that he is the head, we ascertain the impossibility of expressing with words the mystery of the glory of the Saviour.

After this and many considerations on the nature of the Son of God, we remain filled with immense amazement at the thought that such a sublime nature, from the height of its majesty, has descended to such an annihilation as to become man and dwell among men.

Even before showing himself to us in the flesh, he sent the prophets as his precursors and messengers of his coming; after the ascension to heaven, then, he dispersed throughout the whole earth his holy apostles, chosen from among coarse and uncultivated men, publicans and fishermen, but invested with the power of his divinity, so that from every nation and social rank, he could gather a people of faithful believers in him.

But among all the miracles and prodigies that regard him, one especially exceeds the capacity of the human mind and fills it with amazement: the fragility of our intelligence is not able to comprehend or guess how it is possible to believe that such a great power of the divine majesty, the same Word of the Father, the same Wisdom of God, through whom all things visible and invisible have been created, could be contained

in that man who appeared in Judea; that the Wisdom of God entered into the womb of a virgin and was born as a small creature who wailed and cried like all the other babies. Who would have been able to feel the terrors of death as he himself affirmed saying: “My soul is sad to the point of death” (Mt. 26: 38) and, finally, who had been condemned to the most ignominious death among men, even if, after three days, he rose again.

When we see in him such human aspects that make him so close to our human fragility, and others instead that are so divine, that do not suit any other than that first and ineffable nature of the divinity, then the human intelligence stops and, full of immense amazement, does not know where to direct itself, or what to hold on to...It believes him to be God and sees him as a mortal; it thinks him to be a man, but sees him returning victorious from the dead, after having broken the dominion of death. Therefore, with great fear and reverence we must draw ourselves near to the contemplation of this mystery.

Responsorial. *cfr. Is. 9: 1*

R: A holy day will shine out for us: come, people, adore the Lord. * Today a great light has appeared on the earth.

V: Come and adore him, he is the Lord our God.

R: Today a great light has appeared on the earth.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

The following office celebrates the Sunday that falls between 2nd and 5th of January.
The first and second readings of the cycles 1 and 2 are taken from the days of 2nd to 5th January.

YEARS A B C

Gospel. *Jn. 1: 1 –18 (as on the day of Christmas)*

Third Reading and Responsorial, *as on the day of Christmas.*

Or.

Third Reading. *Disc. 13*

God became man so that man could become God.

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

My dearest brethren, today our Lord Jesus Christ, who is forever the creator of all things, has become Saviour for us by being born of a mother. Today by his own free will he was born for us in time, that he might lead us to the eternity of the Father. God was made man that man might become God; that man might partake of the bread of angels, the Lord of angels was today made man.

Today the prophecy has been fulfilled: ‘Pour down dew, you heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain justice: let the earth open, and let it bring forth a saviour’. Therefore he who had made was himself made that he who had been lost might be found. This is what man confesses in the Psalms: ‘Before I was brought low, I sinned’. Man sinned, and was made the accused: God was born as man that the accused might be freed. Man therefore fell down, but God came down. Man fell pitifully, God came down in pity: man fell through pride, God descended with grace.

My brethren, see what miracles and wonders are here. The laws of nature are changed in a man; God is born, a virgin conceives without a man: the Word of God plays a husband’s part to one who knows not a man: she becomes at the same time mother and virgin; made a mother and yet uncorrupted, a virgin having a son, and yet not knowing a man, ever sealed, and yet not barren. For he alone was born without sin whom she brought

forth without a husband's embrace, not by the desire of the flesh, but by the obedience of the spirit.

Responsorial. *1 Jn. 4: 14; 1: 9*

R: We ourselves have seen and bear witness: * the father has sent his Son as Saviour of the world.

V: He forgives our sins and purifies us of all our faults.

R: The Father has sent his Son as Saviour of the world.

Or.

Third Reading. *Disc. 1, 4.5. 6. 9. 10*

He came to save, but it was also necessary that he died.

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

He, who because of his nature could not suffer, out of merciful love exposed himself to great suffering. It must be absolutely excluded that Christ “became” God. Absolutely not! He, being God, as the faith teaches us, moved by pity for men, became man. We do not announce a deified man, but we believe in a God who became man. He chose as his mother his handmaid, he who by nature does not have a mother, and who from the economy of his incarnation excluded an earthly father.

Observe at its roots this economy and exalt therefore, o man, the power of him who has become flesh because the human race was burdened through sin by an insoluble debt that in no way could be paid. In Adam all of us had signed the decree of our condemnation: the devil held us in his power. He had in his hand the decree of our slavery: he boasted titles of possession over us by reason of our body that was a slave of passions. No man could save us, for the fact that he himself was burdened by the debt of sin; and neither would an angel have been able to do it: the price of ransom would not have been sufficient. It remained only for someone, on whom sin did not have any power, God, to have died for sinners. This was the only solution.

And then? He himself who from nothing had called into being all of creation and to whom was certainly not lacking the means for annulling the

debt, found in Him who is the life, the most worthy liberation from death for those who were already condemned to death.

And behold he becomes man being born from the Virgin in an impenetrable way, known only to him. No word can be conformed to so much mystery: he died in that which he had become, he redeemed by the strength of that which he was, as St. Paul says: "Through whom we have the redemption and the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1: 14). O truly stupendous prodigy! He generated and obtained immortality for the others, he who himself was immortal. No one else ever was, is, and will be capable of redeeming, with the exception of he himself who was born of the Virgin, God and man, not only because he was equal to the multitude of sinners, but also because, under many aspects, he was superior to them. As Son, in fact, he conserved unchangingly the same nature of the Father; as the creator of all things he did not lack any power, and immense and inexhaustible is his mercy; finally as pontiff, he assists us in the quality of a valid mediator. Under all these aspects, it would have been impossible to find one who was similar to him. In fact look at his clemency: accused and condemned to death by his own free choice, he destroyed the death that those who had crucified him would have merited; he turned into salvation the perfidy of those who killing him had acted with iniquity.

He had come to save: but it was necessary also that he died. The same eternal God, the Emmanuel, became man and, while by the strength of his divinity he brought salvation, in the humanity he suffered the passion and death. He is the same in the womb of the Father and in that of the mother: he is in the arms of the mother and he glides on the wings of the wind (cfr. Ps. 103: 3); he is adored by the angels in heaven, on the earth he sits at table with the publican.

O mystery! I see the miracles and I recognise the Divinity; I see the sufferings and recognise the humanity. The Emmanuel then, as man opened the doors of nature, but as God he did not violate nor tear the veil of virginity: he came out of the womb, in fact, in the same way as through the word he had entered it, he was born as he had been conceived. He will enter you without passion and come out without corruption.

Responsorial. *Heb. 10: 5, 7; Ps. 39: 9; Jn. 6: 38*

R: Entering into the world he said: You did not want either sacrifice or offering, instead you have prepared for me a body: on the scroll of the book

it is written of me that I do your will; * my God, this is what I desire, your law is in the depths of my heart.

V: I have descended from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of he who sent me.

R: My God this is what I desire, your law is in the depths of my heart

2nd JANUARY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Col. 2: 16 – 3: 4*

New life in Christ.

A reading from the Letter to the Colossians, of St. Paul, apostle.

[Col 2:16] Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath.

[Col 2:17] These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

[Col 2:18] Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,

[Col 2:19] and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

[Col 2:20] If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations,

[Col 2:21] "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"

[Col 2:22] (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines?

[Col 2:23] These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

CHAPT

[Col 3:1] If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

[Col 3:2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

[Col 3:3] For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

[Col 3:4] When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Responsorial. *Col. 3: 1 – 2; Lk. 12: 34*

R: If you have risen with Christ, search for the things from above, where Christ is to be found seated at the right hand of God; * think of the things of heaven, not those of the earth.

V: Where your treasure is there also will your heart be.

R: Think of the things of heaven, not those of the earth.

Second Reading. *C. 26, 61 – 64*

The Lord vivifies his Body in the Spirit.

A reading from the treatise “On the Holy Spirit” of St. Basil the Great, bishop.

For he, who no longer “lives after the flesh,” but, being “led by the Spirit of God,” is called a Son of God, being “conformed to the image of the Son of God,” is described as spiritual.

And as is the power of seeing in the healthy eye, so is the operation of the Spirit in the purified soul. And like reason in the soul, which is at one time the thought in the heart, and at another speech uttered by the tongue, so is the Holy Spirit, as when He “bears witness with our spirit,” and when he “cries in our hearts, Abba, Father,” or when He speaks on our behalf, as it is said, “It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of our Father which speaks in you.”

Again, the Spirit is conceived of, in relation to the distribution of gifts, as a whole in parts. For we all are “members one of another, having gifts differing according to the grace that is given us.” Wherefore “the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you,” but all together complete the Body of Christ in the

Unity of the Spirit, and render to one another the needful aid that comes of the gifts received.

“But God has set the members in the body, every one of them, as it has pleased Him.” But “the members have the same care for one another,” according to the inborn spiritual communion of their sympathy. Wherefore, “whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”

And as parts are in the whole so are we individually in the Spirit, because we all “were baptized in one body into one spirit.”

Another sense may however be given to the phrase, that just as the Father is seen in the Son, so is the Son in the Spirit. The “worship in the Spirit” suggests the idea of the operation of our intelligence being carried on in the light, as may be learned from the words spoken to the woman of Samaria. Deceived as she was by the customs of her country into the belief that worship was in a place. Our Lord, with the object of giving her better instruction, said that worship ought to be offered “in Spirit and in Truth,” plainly meaning by the Truth, Himself.

As then we speak of the worship offered in the Image of God the Father as worship in the Son, so too do we speak of worship in the Spirit as showing in Himself the Godhead of the Lord.

So then, to express it properly and in order, through the illumination of the Spirit, we behold the radiance of God’s glory, the Son; the stamp of God’s very being, we are brought to the one to whom belong the stamp and the identical seal.

Responsorial. *1 Cor. 2: 12, 10; Ep. 3: 5*

R: We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God, in order to know all that God has given us: * the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.

V: This mystery, hidden to all past generations, has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets through the Holy Spirit.

R: The Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Sg. of Songs. 4: 1 – 5: 1*

Christ desires the love of his bride the Church.

A reading from the Song of Songs.

[Song 4:1] Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful!
Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats,
moving down the slopes of Gilead.

[Song 4:2] Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from
the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved.

[Song 4:3] Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely.
Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.

[Song 4:4] Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an arsenal,
whereon hang a thousand bucklers, all of them shields of warriors.

[Song 4:5] Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed
among the lilies.

[Song 4:6] Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will hie me to the
mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense.

[Song 4:7] You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you.

[Song 4:8] Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from
Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Ama'na, from the peak of Senir and
Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.

[Song 4:9] You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have
ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your
necklace.

[Song 4:10] How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! how much better
is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!

[Song 4:11] Your lips distil nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your
tongue; the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon.

[Song 4:12] A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a
fountain sealed.

[Song 4:13] Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest
fruits, henna with nard,

[Song 4:14] nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of
frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all chief spices --

[Song 4:15] a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams
from Lebanon.

[Song 4:16] Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon
my garden, let its fragrance be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his

garden, and eat its choicest fruits.

CHAPT

ER 5

[Song 5:1] I come to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gather my myrrh with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink: drink deeply, O lovers!

Responsorial. *Ps. 44: 11 – 12; Is. 62: 4, 5*

R: Listen my daughter, give ear, forget your people and the house of your father. * Your beauty is pleasing to the king.

V: The Lord will take pleasure in you and your God will be glad for you.

R: Your beauty is pleasing to the king.

Second Reading. *Disc. 15, 4 –6*

Jesus is honey to the mouth, melody to the ear, joy to the heart.

A reading from the “Discourses on the Song of Songs” of St. Bernard, abbot.

I know which is the name that we read of in the prophet Isaiah: His servants will be called by another name, because he who wants to be blessed in the country, wants to be so for the Lord (cfr. Is. 65: 15 – 16). O blessed name, you are oil poured out everywhere! Where? From heaven on Judea and from there over all the earth; and in the whole world the Church exclaims: “Oil poured out is your name” (Sg. of Sgs. 1: 3 vulg.). Truly poured out, because it not only spreads in heaven and on earth, but it sprays also Sheol, so that, “in the name of Jesus every knee will bend in heaven on earth and in the underworld and every tongue will proclaim him” (Phil. 2: 10): “Oil poured out is your name”. Behold Christ, behold Jesus: infused in the angels and poured out on men, in order to save those who had gone totally into putrefaction like beasts in their dung; he, who saves man and beasts (cfr. Ps. 35: 7), in how many ways he multiplied his mercy on us! How precious and how humble! Humble, but an instrument of salvation. If he had not been humble, he would not have let himself be poured out for me; if he had not been an instrument of salvation, he would not have been able to ransom me.

I am a participant of his name, I am also of his inheritance. I am a Christian, therefore a brother of Christ. If I am truly what I am called, I am heir of God, coheir of Christ. What marvel, if the name of the Bridegroom has been poured out, from the moment that he himself has been poured out? He in fact “undressed himself assuming the condition of a servant” (Phil. 2: 7).

And finally he says: “Like water I am poured out” (Ps. 21: 15). The fullness of Divinity, dwelling in the human form on the earth has been poured out, so that all of us who have been dressed with a body of death could be filled with his fullness and, fragrant with his perfume of life, we could exclaim: “Your name is oil poured out”.

There is without doubt a certain analogy between the oil and the name of the Bridegroom, and not without reason the Holy Spirit has drawn near to him. There is – I say - and it consists in the triple function of the oil: it illumines, nourishes, anoints. It feeds the flame, nourishes the body, it soothes pain: it is light, food, medicine.

We can say the same about the name of the Bridegroom: preached he illumines, meditated he nourishes, invoked he soothes and anoints.

Whence do you think that such a great and unexpected light of faith has been diffused in the world if not from the preaching of the name of Jesus? Is it not perhaps that with the light of this name that God has called us to his admirable light? Illuminated by him, in his light we see the light (cfr. Ps. 35: 10), to the point that Paul justly says: “If once you were darkness, now you are light in the Lord” (EP. 5: 8). The same Apostle was ordered to carry this name in front of kings and to the nations, and to the same sons of Israel; and he carried it like a flame that illuminated the country, and he went crying out: “The night is advanced, the day is near at hand. Let us throw away therefore the works of darkness and let us put on the weapons of light: let us behave honestly as in the daytime” (Rm. 13: 12 – 13). And to everyone he showed the flame on the candle-stand, announcing the crucified Christ everywhere.

How this light shone and how it blinded the eyes of all those who were present, when, coming out like lightning from the mouth of Peter, it consolidated the souls and the ankles of the lame man and illuminated many who were blind in the spirit! Was not the flame poured out perhaps when he said: “In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, walk!” (Act. 3: 6)?

And not only is the name of Jesus light, but also food. Do you not feel comforted every time that he appears to your mind? What is it that nourishes better the spirit of he who meditates on him? Who is it that calms in such a way the commotion of the senses, reinvigorates the virtues, develops good habits and honesty and nourishes the chaste affections? Dry is all food to the soul, if it is not covered with this oil; insipid, if it is not seasoned with this salt. If you write, it does not mean anything to me if I do not read you Jesus. If you speak or preach, I do not experience any pleasure if I do not hear the name of Jesus. Jesus is honey to the mouth, melody to the ear, joy to the heart.

Responsorial. *Is. 9: 5*

R: A Child is born for us, a Son has been given to us; on his shoulders is the sign of his sovereignty. *And he is called Admirable Councillor, powerful God, Prince of peace.

V: His dominion will be great and peace will have no end.

R: And he is called Admirable Councillor, powerful God, Prince of peace.

Gospel. *Jn. 1: 19 – 28*

A reading from the Gospel of St. John.

[John 1:19] And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

[John 1:20] He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

[John 1:21] And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No."

[John 1:22] They said to him then, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

[John 1:23] He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

[John 1:24] Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

[John 1:25] They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

[John 1:26] John answered them, "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know,

[John 1:27] even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

[John 1:28] This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

3rd JANUARY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Col. 3: 5 – 16*

The life of the new man.

A reading from the Letter to the Colossians of St. Paul, apostle.

[Col 3:5] Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

[Col 3:6] On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

[Col 3:7] In these you once walked, when you lived in them.

[Col 3:8] But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth.

[Col 3:9] Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices

[Col 3:10] and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

[Col 3:11] Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scyth'ian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

[Col 3:12] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience,

[Col 3:13] forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

[Col 3:14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

[Col 3:15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

[Col 3:16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Responsorial. *cfr. Gal 3: 27 – 28*

R: Baptised in Christ, we have been clothed with Christ: * all of us are one, in Christ Jesus.

V: There is neither Jew nor Greek, nor slave or free, nor man or woman:

R: all of us are one, in Christ Jesus.

Second Reading. *Treat. 17: 7 – 9*

The two precepts of love.

A reading from the “Treatise on John” of St. Augustine, bishop.

The Lord Himself came, the Teacher of love, full of love, “shortening,” as it was predicted of Him, “the word upon the earth,” and showed that the law and the prophets hang on two precepts of love.

What the two precepts are, my brethren, recollect with me. For they ought to be thoroughly familiar to you, and not merely to come into your mind when they are recited by us, but they ought never to be blotted out from your hearts. Let it ever be your supreme thought, that you must love God and your neighbour: “God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” These must always be pondered, meditated, retained, practiced, and fulfilled. The love of God comes first in the order of enjoying; but in the order of doing, the love of our neighbour comes first. For He who commanded you this love in two precepts did not charge you to love your neighbour first, and then God, but first God, afterwards your neighbour.

You however, as you do not yet see God do earn to see Him by loving your neighbour; by loving your neighbour you purge your eye for seeing God, as John evidently says, “If you love not your brother whom you see, how can you love God, whom you do not see?” See, you are told, “Love God.” If you say to me, “Show Him to me, that I may love Him;” what shall I answer, but what the same John says: “No man has seen God at any

time”? And, that you may not suppose yourself to be wholly estranged from seeing God, he says, “God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God.” Therefore love your neighbour; look at the source of your love of your neighbour in you; there you will see, as best you can, God.

Begin, then, to love your neighbour. “Break your bread with the hungry, and bring into your house him that is needy without shelter; if you see the naked, clothe him; and despise not those of your household.” And in doing this, what will you get in consequence? “Then shall your light break forth as the morning light.” Your light is your God, a “morning light” to you, because He shall come to you after the night of this world: for He neither rises nor sets, because He is ever abiding.

By loving your neighbour, by caring for your neighbour, you perform your journey. Where does your journey go, but to the Lord God, whom we ought to love with the whole heart, and with the whole soul, and with the whole mind? For we are not yet come to the Lord, but we have our neighbour with us. Support him, then, when you walk, that you may come to Him with whom you desire to abide.

Responsorial. *1 Jn. 4: 19, 10 – 11, 16*

R: God loved us first, and sent his Son as a victim for our sins. * If God loved us in this manner, we also must love each other.

V: We have recognised and believed in the love that God has for us.

R: If God loved us in this manner, we also must love each other.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Sg. of Songs. 5: 2 – 6: 1*

The Bride searches for and praises the Bridegroom.

A reading from the Song of Songs.

[Song 5:2] I slept, but my heart was awake. Hark! my beloved is knocking.

"Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night."

[Song 5:3] I had put off my garment, how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet, how could I soil them?

[Song 5:4] My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me.

[Song 5:5] I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt.

[Song 5:6] I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer.

[Song 5:7] The watchmen found me, as they went about in the city; they beat me, they wounded me, they took away my mantle, those watchmen of the walls.

[Song 5:8] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love.

[Song 5:9] What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?

[Song 5:10] My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand.

[Song 5:11] His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven.

[Song 5:12] His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set.

[Song 5:13] His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh.

[Song 5:14] His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels. His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires.

[Song 5:15] His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars.

[Song 5:16] His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

CHAPT

ER 6

[Song 6:1] Whither has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Whither has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?

Responsorial. *Sg. of Sgs. 5: 2; Ap. 3: 20*

R: It is my beloved who knocks: * Open to me, my sister, my friend.

V: Behold, I am at the door knocking; if someone opens to me I will dine with him and he with me.

R: Open to me, my sister, my friend.

Second Reading. *Disc. 27: 7 – 9*

I will dwell in the midst of them and I will walk with them.

A reading from the “Discourses on the Song of Songs” of St. Bernard, abbot.

When the Emmanuel brought the teaching of the heavenly doctrine to the earth, when in him and through him the visible image of that heavenly Jerusalem, who is our mother, and the splendour of her beauty was made manifest to us, what did we see, if not the bride in the bridegroom, admiring in the same unique Lord of glory the bridegroom surrounded with a crown and the bride adorned with her jewels? He who descended is the same who has ascended, because no one has ascended to heaven if not the one who has descended: one unique and only Christ, whose head is the bridegroom, and the bride is his body. It is not for nothing that a man who came from heaven appeared on earth, he who made similar to himself, that is heavenly, many among men so that he could fulfil what is read: “as the heavenly man is, so also are the heavenly ones” (1 Cor. 15: 48). From then one lives on earth as in heaven; and in the likeness of the blessed heavenly Jerusalem, even the one here below, which comes from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, unites itself to the heavenly bridegroom with a bond of chaste love, even if it is not yet united like that one, in the vision, but only betrothed in faith, according to the promise of God through the mouth of the prophet: “I will make you my bride in benevolence and in love, I will betroth myself to you in faithfulness” (Hos. 2: 21- 22). For this, she tries to make herself consistent to that same beauty that has descended from heaven: from him she learns to be pure and restrained, demure and holy, patient and comprehensive, meek and humble of heart. With that conduct of life she tries to please, though still far away, him in whom the angels “long to fix their eyes” (1 Pt. 1: 12), in order to prove, with the ardour of her angelic desire, of already being a co-citizen of the saints and the family of God, already the beloved bride. “Come, my elected one, and I will place my throne in you” (cfr. Ps. 44: 11vulg.). Why are you sad now, my soul, why do you get discouraged? Do you doubt that you will be able

to find a place for yourself for the Lord? And who will make it possible for us to find inside ourselves a place that is adapt for so much glory, capable of containing such great majesty? If I was only given the possibility of adoring the earth on which he placed his feet! Who will give me at least the possibility of following the footprints of a soul that he has chosen and given a share of his inheritance? If however he would deign to infuse in my soul the anointing of his mercy, dilating it as is done with a skin that is covered with oil so that it stretches, in a way that I also can say: “I run along the way of your commandments, because you have dilated my heart” (Ps. 118: 32); then maybe I also could offer him inside myself, certainly not a great and adorned cenacle in which he can sit down at table with his disciples, but at least a place where he can recline his head. Almost with envy I look from far away those of whom – blessed – it is said “And I will live in the midst of them and with them I will walk” (2 Cor. 6: 16; cfr. Lev. 26: 11, 12).

Responsorial. *Hos. 2: 19; cfr. Ps. 44: 12*

R: Come, my elected one, and I will place my throne in you; * because the King has fallen in love with your beauty.

V: I will make you my bride in benevolence and in love, I will betroth myself to you in faithfulness.

R: because the King has fallen in love with your beauty.

Gospel. *Jn. 1: 29 – 34*

A reading from the Gospel of St. John.

[John 1:29] The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

[John 1:30] This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.'

[John 1:31] I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."

[John 1:32] And John bore witness, "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him.

[John 1:33] I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

[John 1:34] And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

4th JANUARY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Col. 3: 17 – 4: 1*

The life of the Christian family.

A reading from the Letter to the Colossians of St. Paul, apostle.

[Col 3:17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

[Col 3:18] Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

[Col 3:19] Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

[Col 3:20] Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

[Col 3:21] Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

[Col 3:22] Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord.

[Col 3:23] Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men,

[Col 3:24] knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ.

[Col 3:25] For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

CHAPT

ER 4

[Col 4:1] Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Responsorial. *Col. 3: 17*

R: All that you do in words and deeds, fulfil in the name our Lord Jesus Christ.

V: Give thanks through Him to God the Father:

R: fulfil in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Second Reading. Cent. 1: 8 – 13

An always new mystery.

A reading from the “500 Chapters” of St. Maximus the Confessor.

The Word of God, born once on the level of the flesh, is always born willingly for those who desire it on the level of the spirit, because of his love for men. He becomes an infant, forming himself in them by the virtues; he manifests himself in just the measure of which he knows the one who is receiving him is capable. It is not through any ill will that he diminishes the manifestation of his own majesty; it is rather that he weighs the capacity of those who desire to see him. And so, though the Word of God is always manifested in the life of those who share in him, yet because the mystery is transcendent, he remains always invisible to all.

Thus the holy apostle, in wise consideration of the meaning of the mystery, says: ‘ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever’ – he knows that the mystery is always new, that the mind in understanding it will never deprive it of its freshness.

Christ God is born, made man by the assumption of flesh endowed with an intelligent soul, he who brought things from nothing into existence. A star from the east appears by day and guides the Magi to the place where the Word has taken flesh. This conveys a hidden meaning: it shows that the word of the law and the prophets surpasses the experience of the senses, and guides the gentiles to the greatest light of knowledge. The word of the law and the prophets, like a star devoutly observed, is a clear guide to the knowledge of the incarnate Word for those who are called according to God’s purpose by the power of grace.

God becomes perfect man, then, leaving aside no element of nature – except sin, and this does not belong to nature. He offered his flesh as a bait, to provoke the insatiable dragon to devour the flesh that he was greedily pursuing. This flesh would be poison to the dragon, destroying him utterly

by the power of the divinity in it. But it would be a medicine for human nature, restoring it to its original grace by the power of the divinity in it.

By smearing the tree of knowledge with the poison of evil, the dragon destroyed man when he tasted it. But now, having chosen to devour the Lord's flesh, he too was destroyed, by the power of the divinity in it.

The great mystery of the divine incarnation always remains a mystery. In his essence the Word exists personally in the Father to the full: how is he in his person essentially in the flesh? How can the same person be fully God by nature and become fully man by nature, in no way deprived in either nature, neither in the divine nature by which he is God, nor in ours by which he became man?

Only faith can grasp these mysteries, since it is the substance of things that are beyond intelligence and reason

Responsorial. *Jn. 1: 14, 1*

R: The Word became flesh and came to live among us: * and we have contemplated his glory, glory as the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

V: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God:

R: and we have contemplated his glory, glory as the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Sg. of Songs. 6: 2 – 7: 10*

Praise of the Bride.

A reading from the Song of Songs.

[Song 6:2] My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to pasture his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies.

[Song 6:3] I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he pastures his flock among the lilies.

[Song 6:4] You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.

[Song 6:5] Turn away your eyes from me, for they disturb me -- Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead.

[Song 6:6] Your teeth are like a flock of ewes, that have come up from the washing, all of them bear twins, not one among them is bereaved.

[Song 6:7] Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.

[Song 6:8] There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number.

[Song 6:9] My dove, my perfect one, is only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her. The maidens saw her and called her happy; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her.

[Song 6:10] "Who is this that looks forth like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners?"

[Song 6:11] I went down to the nut orchard, to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom.

[Song 6:12] Before I was aware, my fancy set me in a chariot beside my prince.

[Song 6:13] Return, return, O Shu'lammitte, return, return, that we may look upon you. Why should you look upon the Shu'lammitte, as upon a dance before two armies?

CHAPT

ER 7

[Song 7:1] How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand.

[Song 7:2] Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies.

[Song 7:3] Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.

[Song 7:4] Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rab'bim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus.

[Song 7:5] Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses.

[Song 7:6] How fair and pleasant you are, O loved one, delectable maiden!

[Song 7:7] You are stately as a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters.

[Song 7:8] I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches. Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples,

[Song 7:9] and your kisses like the best wine that goes down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth.

[Song 7:10] I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me.

Responsorial. *Sg. of Sgs. 6: 4, 3; Ps. 84: 11*

R: You are beautiful, my love, comely as Jerusalem; * I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me.

V: Mercy and truth have met, justice and peace have embraced.

R: I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me.

Second Reading. *Disc. 1 for Christmas*

The word of the Lord comes now also to us who await in silence.

A reading from the “Discourses” of Julian of Vézelay, monk.

“While a profound silence enveloped everything and the night was in the middle of its course, your omnipotent word, O Lord, came from the royal throne” (Wis. 18: 14 – 15). The Scriptures refer to this sacred time in which the omnipotent word of God came among us to reveal to us the salvation, descending from the bosom and from the heart of the Father into the womb of a mother. “God, who had already spoken in ancient times in various ways and many times to the fathers through the prophets, in the last times, in these days, has spoken to us through his Son” (Heb. 1: 1- 2) of whom he says: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, listen to him” (Mt. 17: 5). From the royal seat, therefore, the word of the Lord has come down to us, humiliating himself in order to exalt us, undressing himself of his splendour in order to enrich us, incarnating himself in order to make us divine.

But so that the people who have to be saved could have faith and hope in the coming and in the efficacy of this word, it is called omnipotent. If in fact the word was not omnipotent, the man condemned and oppressed by every sort of misery would not have been able to hope with firm faith of being freed from sin and from the punishment of sin. So that the man who was lost could be reassured about his salvation, the word that comes to save him is called omnipotent. Look how omnipotent: the heaven did not exist,

and neither did all that is enclosed in the circle of heaven (cfr. Est. 13: 10 vulg.). “He spoke and everything was made” (Ps. 32: 9). “Was made from nothing” (2. Mac. 7: 28) from the omnipotence of this word that, without solution of time, created together matter and form. This word said: Let the world be; and the world was.

It said: Let man be made: and man was made.

But the redemption was not as simple as the creation had been: he created with the breath of a word, he redeemed with death; he made everything with a command, he remade with his passion. You have made me suffer – he said – for your sins. I did not toil to create the whole world, to sustain it and to govern it: I extend from one end to the other with strength, I govern everything with gentleness (cfr. Wis. 8:1). Only man, violating continuously the law established by me, has made me suffer for his sins.

And so, coming from my royal throne, I have not disdained to close myself in the womb of a virgin or to make myself one with man in his degradation. As soon as I was born, I let myself be wrapped in swaddling clothes and to be laid down in a manger, because for the Creator of the world there is no place in an inn!

And so, a profound silence enveloped everything: the prophets who had announced him kept silent, the Apostles who soon would have preached him kept silent. This silence was placed at the centre and in it the two announcements converged: that of those who had invoked him and that of those who would have preached him.

“While, therefore, a profound silence enveloped everything, your omnipotent word”, that is the Word of the Father “came from his royal throne”. And in a marvellous way, with the mediation of the silence, the mediator between God and men came: man among men. Mortal among mortals, in order to save the dead with his death.

The word of the Lord comes now also to us who wait for it in silence! Let us listen to what God tells us in the intimacy of the soul. The movements of our flesh and the annoying noises fall silent, our restless fantasy also falls silent, in order to listen attentively to what the Spirit, the voice that comes from heaven says.

He speaks continuously in fact to our soul with the Spirit of life and he makes himself the voice that pushes us to the apex of our spirit; but we, distracted by other things, do not listen to him.

Responsorial. *Ps. 109: 3; 2: 7*

R: To you the principality in the day of your power in the midst of holy splendour; * from the womb before the dawn, like dew, I have generated you.

V: The Lord said to me: You are my Son;

R: from the womb before the dawn, like dew, I have generated you.

Gospel. *Jn. 1: 35 – 42*

A reading from the Gospel of St. John.

[John 1:35] The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples;
[John 1:36] and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

[John 1:37] The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

[John 1:38] Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

[John 1:39] He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

[John 1:40] One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

[John 1:41] He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).

[John 1:42] He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

5th JANUARY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Col. 4: 2 – 18*

Exhortation to be vigilant.

Conclusion of the Letter.

A reading from the Letter to the Colossians of St. Paul, apostle.

[Col 4:2] Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving;

[Col 4:3] and pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison,

[Col 4:4] that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak.

[Col 4:5] Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.

[Col 4:6] Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one.

[Col 4:7] Tych'icus will tell you all about my affairs; he is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.

[Col 4:8] I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts,

[Col 4:9] and with him Ones'imus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of yourselves. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

[Col 4:10] Aristar'chus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions -- if he comes to you, receive him),

[Col 4:11] and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

[Col 4:12] Ep'aphras, who is one of yourselves, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always remembering you earnestly in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

[Col 4:13] For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in La-odice'a and in Hi-erap'olis.

[Col 4:14] Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.

[Col 4:15] Give my greetings to the brethren at La-odice'a, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

[Col 4:16] And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the La-odice'ans; and see that you read also the letter from La-odice'a.

[Col 4:17] And say to Archip'pus, "See that you fulfil the ministry which you have received in the Lord."

[Col 4:18] I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my fetters. Grace be with you.

Responsorial. *cfr. Col. 4: 3; Ps. 50: 17*

R: Let us pray for one another, so that God may open the door for the word,
* to announce the mystery of Christ.

V: May the Lord open our lips, and our mouths to proclaim the praise of God.

R: to announce the mystery of Christ.

Second Reading. *Disc. 194, 3 – 4*

We will be satisfied by the vision of the Word.

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

What man knows all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ and concealed in the poverty of his flesh? Though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich. When he made mortality his own and made away with death, he appeared in poverty; but he promised riches, riches that were only deferred – he did not lose riches that were taken away from him.

How great is the abundance of his goodness which he hides for those who fear him, which he perfects for those who hope in him! Our knowledge is partial until what is perfect comes. To make us fit to receive this perfection, he who is equal to the Father in the form of God and made like to us in the form of a slave, transforms us to the likeness of God. The only Son of God, made son of man, makes many sons of men sons of God. The

slaves, sustained by the visible form of the slave, he frees and makes children so that they may see the form of God.

We are God's children; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. What are those treasures of wisdom and knowledge, what are those divine riches, except what is sufficient for us? What is the abundance of goodness, except what fills us? Show us the Father, then, and it is sufficient for us.

In one of the psalms someone says to him from among us or within us or for us: 'I shall be filled when your glory is manifested'. He and the Father are one: whoever sees him sees the Father also. So then, he, the Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory. He will bring us back, he will show us his face; and we shall be saved, we shall be filled, he will be sufficient for us.

Until this happens, until he shows us what is sufficient for us, until we drink him as the fountain of life and are filled, - until then we are exiles from him and walk by faith, until then we hunger and thirst for justice, and long with a passion beyond words for the beauty of the form of God; - until then, let us celebrate his birth in the form of a slave with humble devotion.

We are not yet able to contemplate the fact that the Father begot him before the dawn, but let our minds dwell on the fact that he was born of the Virgin during the hours of night. We do not yet grasp that his name endures before the sun, but let us acknowledge his tent placed in the sun.

Though we still do not behold the only Son abiding in his Father, let us remember the Bridegroom coming out from his bridal room. Though we are still unready for our Father's banquet, let us acknowledge the manger of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Responsorial. *1 Jn. 1: 2; 5: 20*

R: The life was made visible and we have seen it; and we announce to you the eternal life, * who was with the Father.

V: We know that the Son of God has come, and he has given us the intelligence to know the true God. We are in the true God and in his Son Jesus Christ.

R: who was with the Father.

First Reading. *Sg. of Songs 7: 11 – 8: 7*

The last words of the Bride and the praise to love.

A reading from the Song of Songs.

[Song 7:11] Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages;

[Song 7:12] let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love.

[Song 7:13] The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and over our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.

CHAPT

ER 8

[Song 8:1] O that you were like a brother to me, that nursed at my mother's breast! If I met you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me.

[Song 8:2] I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the juice of my pomegranates.

[Song 8:3] O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!

[Song 8:4] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please.

[Song 8:5] Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in travail with you, there she who bore you was in travail.

[Song 8:6] Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame.

[Song 8:7] Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.

Responsorial. *Sg. of Sgs. 8: 6 – 7; Ep. 2: 4*

R: Love is as strong as death, jealousy is tenacious as the grave: its flashes are flashes of fire. * The great waters cannot quench love.

V: Because of the great love with which God loved us, he sent His Son on the earth.

R: The great waters cannot quench love.

Second Reading. *Disc. 31, 8 – 10*

He is the shepherd, he is the pasture, he is salvation.

A reading from the “Discourses on the Song of Songs” of St. Bernard, abbot.

In the whole of the text of the Song you will find the Word hidden in images of this type. And for this I think that the prophet, when he says: “Our breath is the anointed of the Lord; we live among the nations in his shadow” (Lam. 4: 20) means that now, naturally, we see as in a mirror, in a confused manner and not yet face to face. This, certainly, as long as we live among men; when we will be among the angels, it will be completely different: then finally, in a state of imperturbable beatitude, together with them we also will see him, exactly as he is, that is not any more in shadow but in his divine essence.

As in fact we say that for our fathers there was the shadow and the figure, while to us has shown out though grace the same truth of Christ present in the flesh, so that we cannot deny that we also, with respect to the future age, live, so to say, in the shadow of the truth as the Apostle says: “Our knowledge is imperfect, imperfect is our prophecy” (1 Cor. 13: 9) and also: “I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it” (Phil. 3: 13). How can there not be a difference between he who walks in faith and he who is already in the vision? The just man, therefore, lives in faith, the blessed exults in the vision; therefore the holy man lives on the earth in the shadow of Christ; the holy angel, in heaven, exults in the splendid light of glory.

The shadow of faith is providential: it sharpens the reflexes of the eye that is obscured and prepares it to sustain the light; it is written in fact: With faith he purifies their hearts (cfr. Acts 15:9). Faith therefore does not suffocate the light, but filters it. The shadow of faith conserves for me, in a secure place, all that the angels see openly, in order to reveal it to me in its time. The mother of the Lord also lived in this shadow of faith; in fact to

her was said: “Blessed are you who have believed” (cfr. Lk. 1: 45). She welcomed in her womb the precious shadow of the body of Christ when she heard: “Over you the power of the Most High will spread his shadow” (Lk. 1: 34). And that which is formed by the power of the Most High is not a common shadow. There is in fact such a strength in the flesh of Christ while he makes himself shadow for the Virgin, that, which is an impossible thing for a mortal woman, she, having conceived a life giving body, welcomes in her womb the presence of the divine majesty and sustains the inaccessible light. In the strength of which all other contrary forces are overcome. Power and shadow that casts out the demons, protects men; force that gives life, shadow that gives comfort.

We who walk in faith live therefore in the shadow of Christ and we nourish ourselves of his flesh in order to have life. The flesh of Christ is truly food. And who knows if it is not exactly for this that he presented himself in this passage in the image of a shepherd to whom the bride turns to ask: “Tell me where you pasture your flock, where you make them rest at midday” (Sg. of Sgs. 1: 7). A good shepherd is he who gives his life for his sheep! The life for them, the flesh to them: that in ransom, this in food. A truly stupendous thing! He is the shepherd, He is the pasture, He is salvation.

Responsorial. *Is. 40: 10, 11; Jn. 10: 11*

R: Behold, the Lord God comes with power. Like a shepherd he pastures his flock: * with his arm he gathers them; he carries the lambs on his breast and leads slowly the mother ewes.

V: I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd offers his life for the sheep.

R: With his arm he gathers them; he carries the lambs on his breast and leads slowly the mother ewes.

Gospel. *Jn. 1: 43 – 51*

A reading from the Gospel of St. John.

[John 1:43] The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

[John 1:44] Now Philip was from Beth-sa'ida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
[John 1:45] Philip found Nathan'a-el, and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

[John 1:46] Nathan'a-el said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

[John 1:47] Jesus saw Nathan'a-el coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"

[John 1:48] Nathan'a-el said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

[John 1:49] Nathan'a-el answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

[John 1:50] Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these."

[John 1:51] And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

6th JANUARY

(When the Solemnity of the Epiphany is celebrated on 7th or 8th January)

CYCLES 1 AND 2

First Reading. *Is 42: 1-8*

The humble servant of the Lord.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

[Isa 42:1] Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations.

[Isa 42:2] He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;

[Isa 42:3] a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

[Isa 42:4] He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.

[Isa 42:5] Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:

[Isa 42:6] "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,

[Isa 42:7] to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

[Isa 42:8] I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to graven images.

Responsorial. *Mt 12: 18,21 (Is 42:1)*

R: Here is my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul delights* In his name the nations will put their hope.

V: I will endow him with my spirit, and he will proclaim the true faith to the nations.

R: In his name the nations will put their hope.

The Second Reading with its Responsory is taken from the Sunday of the Baptism of the Lord.

7th JANUARY.

(When the Solemnity of the Epiphany is celebrated on 8th January)

CYCLES 1 AND 2.

First Reading. *Is 61: 1-11*

The spirit of the Lord is upon his Servant.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

[Isa 61:1] The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

[Isa 61:2] to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

[Isa 61:3] to grant to those who mourn in Zion -- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

[Isa 61:4] They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

[Isa 61:5] Aliens shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers;

[Isa 61:6] but you shall be called the priests of the LORD, men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory.

[Isa 61:7] Instead of your shame you shall have a double portion, instead of dishonor you shall rejoice in your lot; therefore in your land you shall possess a double portion; yours shall be everlasting joy.

[Isa 61:8] For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

[Isa 61:9] Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

[Isa 61:10] I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

[Isa 61:11] For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

Responsorial. *Is 61: 1; Jn 8:42*

R: The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, * to bind up hearts that are broken, to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison.

V: I have come here from God; yes, I have come from him; not that I came because I chose, no, I was sent by him,

R: to bind up the hearts that are broken...

The Second Reading: Discourse 13 of St Augustine is the third reading of the second Sunday after Christmas.

6th JANUARY
(Or Sunday between 2 and 8 January)

EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

SOLEMNITY

CYCLES 1 and 2

First Reading. *Is. 60: 1 – 22*

The Lord manifests his glory over Jerusalem.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

[Isa 60:1] Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

[Isa 60:2] For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

[Isa 60:3] And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

[Isa 60:4] Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms.

[Isa 60:5] Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

[Isa 60:6] A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Mid'ian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

[Isa 60:7] All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Nebai'oth shall minister to you; they shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will glorify my glorious house.

[Isa 60:8] Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows?

[Isa 60:9] For the coastlands shall wait for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your sons from far, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you.

[Isa 60:10] Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you; for in my wrath I smote you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you.

[Isa 60:11] Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut; that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession.

[Isa 60:12] For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste.

[Isa 60:13] The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the plane, and the pine, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious.

[Isa 60:14] The sons of those who oppressed you shall come bending low to you; and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

[Isa 60:15] Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic for ever, a joy from age to age.

[Isa 60:16] You shall suck the milk of nations, you shall suck the breast of kings; and you shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

[Isa 60:17] Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I will make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness.

[Isa 60:18] Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.

[Isa 60:19] The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

[Isa 60:20] Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

[Isa 60:21] Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land for ever, the shoot of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified.

[Isa 60:22] The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the LORD; in its time I will hasten it.

Responsorial. *Is. 60: 1, 3*

R: Arise, clothe yourself in light, Jerusalem, because he who illuminates you is coming: * above you the glory of the Lord shines.

V: In your light the people will walk, kings in the splendour that radiates from you:

R: above you the glory of the Lord shines.

Or.

Responsorial. *Is. 60: 1, 3, 4*

R: Jerusalem, your light comes, the glory of the Lord shines over you. *
The people will walk in your light, the kings in the splendour of your rising.

V: Your sons will come from afar, your daughters carried in the arms.

R: The people will walk in your light, the kings in the splendour of your rising.

CYCLE 1

Second Reading. *Disc. 3 for Epiphany 1 –3, 5*

The Lord has manifested his salvation in the whole world.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Leo the Great, pope.

The providential Mercy of God, having determined to succour the perishing world in these latter times, foreordained the salvation of all nations in the Person of Christ. In this connection an innumerable succession was once promised to the most blessed patriarch Abraham to be begotten not by fleshly seed but by fertile faith; and therefore it was compared to the stars in multitude that as father of all the nations he might hope not for an earthly but for a heavenly progeny. Let the fullness of the nations enter into the family of the patriarchs, yes let it enter, and let the sons of the promise receive in Abraham’s seed the blessing which his sons, according to the flesh, renounce their claim to. In the three Magi let all people worship the Author of the universe: and let God be known not in Judea alone, but in all the world, so that everywhere “His name” may be “great in Israel.”

Taught then, dearly-beloved, by these mysteries of Divine grace, let us with the joy of the spirit celebrate the day of our first-fruits and the commencement of the nations’: “giving thanks to” the merciful God “who

made us worthy,” as the Apostle says, “to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light: for delivering us from the power of darkness and transferring us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.” For as Isaiah prophesied, “the people of the nations that sat in darkness, have seen a great light, and they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shone.” Of these he also says to the Lord, “nations which knew you not, shall call on you: and peoples which were ignorant of you, shall run together unto you.”

This day “Abraham saw and was glad,” when he understood that the sons of his faith would be blessed in his seed, that is, in Christ, and foresaw that by believing he should be the father of all nations, “giving glory to God and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.” This day David sang of in the psalms saying: “all nations that you have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord: and they shall glorify your name;” and again: “The Lord has made known His salvation: His righteousness He has openly manifested in the sight of the nations.”

This in good truth we know to have taken place ever since the three wise men aroused in their far-off land were led by a star to recognize and worship the King of heaven and earth. And surely their worship of Him exhorts us to imitation; that, as far as we can, we should serve our gracious God who invites us all to Christ. For whosoever lives religiously and chastely in the Church and “sets his mind on the things which are above, not on the things that are upon the earth,” is in some measure like the heavenly light: and whilst he himself keeps the brightness of a holy life, he points out to many the way to the Lord like a star. In which regard, dearly-beloved, you ought all to help one another in turn, that in the kingdom of God, which is reached by right faith and good works, you may shine as the sons of light: through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with God the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Mt. 2: 10, 11*

R: On this day of light the Saviour of the world has appeared, announced by the prophets, adored by the angels. * The Magi see his star, and full of joy they bring him gifts.

V: A holy day will shine out for us: come, nations, adore the Lord.

R: The Magi see his star, and full of joy they bring him gifts.

CYCLE 2

Second Reading. *Ps. 66: 3 – 5*

The peoples praise you, God, all the peoples praise you.

A reading from the “Treatise on the psalms” of St. Hillary, bishop.

“Let your face shine on us O Lord, and have pity on us” (Ps. 66: 2). We need the blessing of God, that his face shines on us, because the light of the knowledge of him enlightens the darkness of our hearts, the spirit of his majesty clears away the doubts of our intellect and we can give him glory saying: “Let the light of your face shine on us O Lord” (Ps. 4: 7). This light of his face that shines on us is the gift of his mercy, which begins with the forgiveness of sins. The words that follow are there to indicate to what end the prophets and the apostles invoke the light of the face of the Lord. “So that your ways may be known on the earth, your salvation among all the nations” (Ps. 66: 3). According to the exact interpretation of the Greek metaphor, they ask to be illuminated by his face so that the way of the Lord that is the doctrine of the life of faith may be known on the earth: through it in fact, one arrives to God. But the doctrine of the life of faith is Christ himself, who in the gospel shows himself as being this by saying: “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father if not through me” (Jn. 14: 6).

The same name of Jesus, in the propriety of the language signifies salvation: salvation in fact, in Hebrew is Jesus. The angel also confirms this speaking to Mary and Joseph: “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: 21). The angel demonstrates in this way that they have to call him Jesus exactly because he will be the salvation of the people. The apostles confess that they are not capable of preaching him if they are not illuminated, if they do not manage to radiate the light of the face of the Lord. They also, in fact, according to the gospel are “light of the world” (Mt. 5: 14).

True light, however, is the Lord; the prophets and the apostles are illuminated by the light, so that they may be light. It is necessary then that to this prophetic and apostolic teaching follows the praise of the people and the joy for the remission of sins; and not only for this, but also for the

certainty that he himself who has forgiven the sins will judge the peoples with justice, and he will guide in the way of life all the nations of the earth who, having abandoned the error of idolatry, are instructed in the knowledge of God. For this it follows: "The peoples praise you, God, all the peoples praise you. The nations exult and rejoice, because you judge the peoples with justice, you govern the nations on the earth" (Ps. 66: 4 – 5).

With the expression "The peoples praise you" is clearly indicated the believers or those who will believe among the twelve tribes of Israel. With the words "All the peoples will praise you" he intends to exclude any type of exception. Finally with the expression "The nations will exult and rejoice because you judge the peoples with justice, and govern the nations on the earth" the hope of the eternal judgement and the entrance of the nations into the way of life is indicated as the cause of joy.

Responsorial. Ps. 71: 10 – 11

R: The kings of Tarsus and of the islands will bring offerings, * The kings of Arabia and Saba will offer gifts to the Lord.

V: All the nations will come to adore him; all the peoples will serve him.

R: The kings of Arabia and Saba will offer gifts to the Lord.

YEARS A B C

Gospel. Mt. 2: 1 – 12

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

[Mat 2:1] Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying,

[Mat 2:2] "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him."

[Mat 2:3] When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

[Mat 2:4] and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

[Mat 2:5] They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet:

[Mat 2:6] `And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'"

[Mat 2:7] Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared;

[Mat 2:8] and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

[Mat 2:9] When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was.

[Mat 2:10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy;

[Mat 2:11] and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

[Mat 2:12] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Third Reading. Hom. 6

Let us also welcome into our hearts that great joy.

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

The star stopped over the place where the baby was to be found. Merely seeing the star, the Magi experienced a great joy. The same joy that the angels announced to the shepherds. Let us adore him together with the Magi, let us give him glory with the shepherds, let us exult with the angels, "because today a Saviour is born to us who is Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2: 11). "God, the Lord is our light" (Ps. 118: 27): not in the form of God, in order not to frighten our weakness, but in the form of a servant, in order to bring freedom to those who lay in slavery. Who is he who has a soul that is so insensible, so ungrateful, so as not to feel the joy of expressing with gifts his own exultation? It is a feast for the whole of creation: the heaven is given to the earth, an archangel is sent to Zechariah and to Mary, a host of angels sing "Glory to God in the highest of heavens and peace on earth to men whom he loves" (Lk. 2: 14).

The stars show themselves from heaven, the Magi leave their country, the earth is all gathered in a cave. There is no one who does not bring something, no one who is not grateful. Let us celebrate the salvation of the world, the birth of the human race.

Today the fault of Adam has been remitted. Now we do not have to hear anymore “You are dust and to dust you will return” (Gn. 3: 19), but, united to him who has come from heaven, you will be admitted into heaven. No more will it be heard “You will give birth to children in pain” (Gn. 3: 19). Blessed, in fact, is she who gave birth to the Emmanuel, and the breasts that fed him! It is exactly for this that “a Baby is born for us, a Son has been given to us. On his shoulder is the sign of his sovereignty” (Is. 9: 5).

Unite yourselves to those who from heaven welcome joyfully the Lord.

Think of the shepherds filled with wisdom, of the priests enriched by the gift of prophecy, of the women flooded with joy: Mary because of the announcement of Gabriel, Elizabeth for John who jumps in her womb, Anna who gave the happy announcement; and Simeon who received the Baby in his arms. All of them adored in him the great God, not scorning the infantile features that they saw, but praising the greatness of his divinity. The divine power, in fact, like a ray through a crystal, shown in that human body, glowing in front of the pure eyes of their hearts. If only we too could find ourselves with them to contemplate with a pure gaze, as reflected in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, in order that we too may be transformed through glory in glory, through the grace and goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ. To him be glory and sovereignty forever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial. *Mt. 2: 9 – 11*

R: The star that the Magi had seen rising, preceded them, until it arrived and stopped over the place where the Baby was to be found. * On seeing it they felt a great joy.

V: And entering into the house, they saw the Baby with Mary his mother, and prostrating themselves they adored him.

R: On seeing it they felt a great joy.

Or.

Third Reading. *Disc. 2*

Today Christ has been manifested to the world.

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

Today Christ has manifested himself to the world, today he has received the mystery of baptism and, receiving it, he has consecrated it with his presence. Today, as the faith teaches the believers, during a wedding feast he changed water into wine. In the spiritual sense, the water changed into wine represents the grace of the gospel that abolishes the letter of the law, and shines out through the virtue of the Christ. Christ is baptised, the world is renewed. Christ is baptised, and we are undressed of the old man and clothed with the new man. Having expelled that first earthly man, who has come from the earth, we redress ourselves with the heavenly man, who has come from heaven. When Christ is baptised, the mystery of the holy baptism is consecrated by the presence of all of the Trinity: from heaven, behold the voice of the Father: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 3: 17); the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove, yet only the Son wants to be baptised by John. On this the blessed Hillary expresses himself in a way that marvellously translates the orthodoxy of his doctrine. Even if all of the Trinity operates in the incarnation of the Word and in the mystery of the baptism, only the Son is baptised by John, as only he was born of the Virgin and, even though having assumed flesh with all of its passions, he lived above all without sin and, by the strength of his divine nature, he remained impassive. This day of feast is much more important, in as much as it follows closely after that of the nativity of the Lord. When God is adored in the Baby, the mystery of the virginal childbirth is adored. When gifts are offered to the man-God, the dignity of the divine baby is adored. When the baby is found with Mary, the human nature of Christ and the virginity of the Mother of God is affirmed. The evangelist says in fact: “Entering into the house, they saw the baby with Mary his mother, and prostrating themselves they adored him. Then they opened their jewel cases and offered him gifts of gold, incense and myrrh” (Mt. 2: 11). The gifts offered by the Magi reveal the profound mystery of Christ. With gold they proclaim him king, with incense they adore him as God, with myrrh they recognise him as man. We therefore believe that Christ assumed our mortal nature so that, with his unique death, we could see our double death destroyed. How Christ appeared as a mortal and had paid the debt of death we find written in Isaiah: “He was like a lamb led to the slaughter” (Is. 53: 7). Our faith in the royalty of Christ is confirmed by the divine authority; in

fact he says of himself in a psalm: “I have been constituted king by him” (Ps. 2: 6 vulg.) that is by God the Father. And that he is the King of kings he himself says with the words of Wisdom: “Through me the kings will reign, and the magistrates issue just decrees” (Prv. 8: 15). That Christ, finally, is truly God and Lord, is proved, wherever we turn, by the entire world created by him. He himself, in fact, says in the Gospel: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt. 28: 18). And the blessed evangelist: “Everything has been made through him and without him nothing was made” (Jn. 1: 3). If it is recognised that all things were created by him and exist in him, it follows that all things have recognised his coming.

Responsorial. *cfr. Mt. 2: 11*

R: A great king is born in Israel, and the kings of the earth come to adore him, * and they offer him gifts of gold, incense and myrrh.

V: And entering into the house, they saw the baby with Mary, his mother, and prostrating themselves they adored him.

R: and they offered him gifts of gold, incense and myrrh.