

## A Light to enlighten the pagans

A vestige of the Christmas story breaks into our Sunday liturgy this weekend and it affords for us the opportunity to call to mind once more the essential truth that the infancy narrative unfolds for us; namely that in the life death and resurrection of Jesus, God has visited and redeemed his people.

Sometimes we are apt to look at the Lucan stories surrounding the birth of Jesus as simple biographical events which tell of the birth and subsequent upbringing of the infant Jesus. However as you know, the gospels are not just a vehicle for the narrating of the events in Jesus' life. Instead whilst Luke certainly places importance on the reality of what took place, there is, underpinning this reality, the fundamental truth of what they convey. To see how this happens we need to understand the symbolism at work.

The first reading today is from the Prophet Malachi. It is the last book of the Old Testament. In it Malachi proclaims: *Look I shall my messenger to clear a way before me. And suddenly the Lord you seek will come to his temple....I shall send you the prophet Elijah before the great and awesome day of YHWH comes.* In a link which should hit between the eyes Luke begins his gospel in the Temple by telling us of Zechariah and Elizabeth, who will be the parents of John the Baptist who himself will be identified with Elijah. The symbolism is plain to see. Luke is telling us that the Day of the Lord is at last dawning and in the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Simeon, a personification of Old Testament symbolism, announces through his canticle this fulfilment. However Luke also knows that the cross and its shadow can never be separated from the events that will accompany the mission of Jesus, and that discipleship and the decision to follow Jesus will be the result of a judgment which each of us is required to make. Will rejection or acceptance of him and his message be our choice?

So we see how dense the theology can become, but if there is one way of finding our path through it all then consider Mary. Of all the characters in the infancy story she is the only adult to have survived into Jesus' ministry, and this question of discipleship set against rejection, continues to confront her; recall if you will Jesus' words when he defines his true family not in terms of blood relations, but in terms of those who through discipleship carry out the Word of God. In this Mary remains steadfast and resolute to the end. She goes beyond the passion and through the resurrection to become a member of the Church in which. Luke tells us, she gathered with the rest of the apostles to pray with one heart.

This calling goes to the heart of my own relationship with my faith and my discipleship. How are the events and challenges of my life impacted by how my faith speaks to me? If the stories of the gospel remain as events frozen on a page then their symbolism and their message somehow fail to resonate. On the other hand if I see in these events the working out of God's love for me through the gift of his Son, then all that takes place becomes essential to the honesty of my witness to my faith. Here is my "yes" to God just like Mary's and even when that "yes" gets a bit wobbly, the gospel will never fail to align the events of my life with Jesus. We will all go through many ups and downs, questions

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and doubts about what it all means, but in our resolve to live out our discipleship, the Lord we all seek will enlighten our eyes.