

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Wednesday, December 25, is the Nativity of the Lord.
Sunday, December 29, is the Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Before beginning prayer with the Sacred Texts, let us take a look at the week ahead in Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

December 26 (St. Stephen), 27 (St John), and 28, the Holy Innocents. Evening prayer each day is for the Octave of Christmas. In the monastic liturgy, elements of Vigils, Lauds, and Vespers express the Octave of Christmas

December 30: 6th day in the Octave of Christmas

December 31: 7th day in the Octave of Christmas

January 1: Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. Also, "World Day of Prayer for Prayer on Earth".

January 2: Sts. Basil and Gregory (Memorial)

January 3 and 4 are simply weekdays of Christmas Time.

In the Australian Church:

December 28: Anniversary of the death of Bishop Joseph Grech (Sandhurst).

December 30: Cairns – Anniversary of the death of Bishop John Torpie

In the Social Justice Calendar:

December 26, 2003: Devastating tsunami in South Asia, killing up to 300,000 people.

December 31, 1946: Granting of paid annual leave to workers in Australia.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

Christmas - The Nativity of the Lord

Lectio: The Gospel text for Midnight Mass is from Luke chapter 2, verses 1-14.

Read it slowly, resisting the temptation to turn it into an academic exercise.

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep reverence. This text is given to all of us on this Christmas, for our formation as Christians. If you are praying with this text at home, you may want to light a candle as a symbol of the fire of God's word, and its power to speak to your heart.

Meditatio: Some background on the text, so that we can understand it more profoundly, and make our response to it.

Luke chapter 2, verses 1-14 holds a number of themes with hands outstretched towards us. First of all, there is JOY. A Carthusian Monk, commenting on the Christmas Liturgy remarks: "One ought to speak joyfully about joy, sing it like the angels on the night of Jesus' birth." However, he goes on to challenge us: "We remain too fastened to our fears, to our self-sufficiency, independence, pride, shoddy riches, cherished poverties, in short to ourselves. And because of this, true joy most often cannot be experienced." Like the shepherds, we are terrified, even though

surrounded by all the things we have bought before Christmas. They are just “things”. They give us a temporary joy, as we have fun with them.

The real joy comes from the announcement of the angel: “I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

Read the text slowly, marking some of the words, phrases, sentences and their textual meaning. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Feast of the Holy Family – Sunday 29 December

Lectio: The gospel for the Feast of the Holy Family, Year A is from Matthew 2:13-15 and 19-23.

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it.

This text follows on from the birth of Jesus, the visit of shepherds and the visit of the wise men from the East. The central figure is Joseph. “The New Testament dream-narratives are centered on Christ. God guides those who belong to him, as we see in this text.” (Bauer, Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology, Volume 1). Joseph is told of impending violence, and is advised to flee to the land of Egypt. He obeys the angel, and this little family sets out for Egypt, where they live as refugees until Herod the Great dies. “Herod the Great reigned from 37- 4 BC., levying heavy taxes on the Jews, conscripting labour, and building massive public works projects.” He was paranoid about anyone usurping his throne. He was the first ruler in Israel, after Rome had conquered the land. (Who’s Who of the Bible, ed. Paul Gardner). The phenomenon of the “dream” is used a second time. The angel announces that it is safe to return to Israel. A third warning is given to Joseph about the ruler Archelaus. He was the tetrarch of Judea, Samaria and Idumea from 4BC to 6AD. He is mentioned only once in the Bible, in Matthew 2:22. He was the son of Herod the Great by one of Herod’s several wives, Malthace. When Herod died in 4 BC his kingdom was divided between three of his sons. (Who’s Who of the Bible).

While it is quite straight forward as an historical account, with definite characters, there is a deep and strong foundation. We need to get right down into that foundation.

Read the text again and be aware of the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist on the strings of the harp. The Holy Spirit will bring forth the most beautiful response to this reading. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

EVANGELIZATIO: My lived response to the texts with which the Church exhorts me to pray. St. James says, “Be doers of the Word.” And the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that the Word of God is in our hands to do it.

1. My response is to something the Carthusian monk said – about our fears. A lot of the time, we are careful not to show too much joy. “The joy of an adult”, he says, “is so often stiff while that of the child is so complete.” Many of us, I’m sure, are helped at Christmastime by the joy of children. Children make us happy. Their joy is complete, just as Jesus wanted it to be for all of us. In the recent bushfire devastation, several “givers” were

interviewed quickly. All were joyful, the secret being, that they were “givers”, actively giving. They were present with drinking water for the firefighters, breakfast lunch and tea for the men and women on the ground, a shoulder here and there to cry on, pets to be cared for, horses to be moved, koalas to be rescued, livestock to be shifted away from immediate danger. Surely this was a manifestation of God’s love. The angel said: “you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” You will find children, pets, animals, emotionally broken people, with no satisfactory accommodation, just as Mary and Joseph had nowhere to go, except to sleep with the lowly animals.

2. It is not hard for me to respond to this text from Matthew, entering into the journey of this one family, seeking a home away from violence, the cruel form of violence epitomized in the slaughter of the innocent children. I refer with this reflection, to the article written by Christopher Lamb, the Rome correspondent for “The Tablet”, who writes: “Pope Francis’s core priorities are a ‘seamless garment’ defence of the poorest and most vulnerable that embraces the protection of the planet.” I have read these words over and over and marveled at Lamb’s ability to use the metaphor of the ‘seamless garment’. On Calvary, it was what the soldiers gambled for, rolling dice to see who gets it. The seamless garment in the above statement has the ability to stretch, defending the poorest and most vulnerable, embracing planet earth – everywhere are the poor, the vulnerable, those without water, those without food, those who can’t farm because the earth is drying up. Everywhere are farmers who have no water, whose livestock are dying. Pope Francis, in “*Laudato Si*” reminded us that mother earth is crying out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.

*A blessed Christmas to our
Oblates and Friends
From the
Jamberoo Abbey Community*

