

CHRISTMASTIDE 2011



At this busy time when our usual routines are disrupted it is not surprising that it can be especially difficult to set aside time for prayer.

*Let us remember Abbot Chapman's famous dictum:
"Pray as you can, not as you can't"*

During this blessed season let every one we meet be recognised as a gift from God. Let our prayer manifest itself in the way we receive each one into our hearts and our homes.

May we make a gift to the Christ child in the crib of those precious moments when we are able to be alone with him, in silence and in peace.

With the birth of God's son, his glory broke into our world, a foretaste of the joy we will know when the fullness of his glory has filled the earth.

Collect of the Midnight Mass Christmas day



O God,



who have made this most sacred night
radiant with the splendour of the true light,
grant, we pray, that we, who have known the mysteries of his
light on earth, may also delight in his gladness in heaven.

Part of The Gospel from Christmas Day —

Midnight mass Luke 2: 1-7

Now at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken. The census—the first—took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to be registered. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David's house and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a Son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn.



To enable us to situate clearly the political background surrounding the birth of Jesus, Luke gives us the names of the Roman emperor and of his Governor of Syria. Jesus was born subject to a foreign power under the rule of Caesar Augustus whom his subjects often called 'Saviour'.

I read the familiar story several times until I can put it aside and ponder how it touches me.

Can I begin to imagine the harrowing journey for Mary as she covers the 90 miles between Nazareth and Bethlehem?

Can I sense the relief when at last they arrive at their destination?

To help me enter fully into this scene, it may help to make use of all my senses.

I hear the cries of the other travellers jostling for a room, I smell the animals and the manger full of hay, I share in Mary's pain and joy as she finally sees her baby.

I stay as long as I wish within the scene.

Perhaps I contrast the insignificance and the utter poverty of the place with the momentous event which has just taken place: the birth of the true Saviour.

When I am ready, I slowly leave the scene, thanking the Lord for being with me. In the hectic days to come, I may want to go back to this scene in my heart to find a moment's peace with Jesus.

***The Gospel from January 1st,
Mary, Mother of God Luke 2: 16-20***

The shepherds hurried away to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God, for all they had heard and seen; it was exactly as they had been told.



Here in this continuation of Luke’s Gospel from Midnight Mass we find two very different attitudes to prayer.

The shepherds give us a perfect example of prayer in action. Having come in a hurry to see if what the angel has told them is true, and having found that this is so, they repeat the message of Good News to all present. They then go on their way audibly praising God with gratitude.

Mary is our perfect example of contemplative prayer. We don’t hear what she has to say or even what she may be thinking. Mary silently reflects deeply on the mystery that surrounds her, and in which she plays a vital role as ‘Mother of God’.

On each day of Christmas
my true love sent to me
his Word to guide my way.



Part of the Gospel for the Epiphany— Matthew 2: 1-3, 9-12

During the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the East. "Where is the infant King of the Jews?" they asked. "We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage." When King Herod heard this he was perturbed... Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; ...The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.



The three wise men in the story are not historical characters, they simply show us that God, in the person of this tiny baby Jesus, has come into the world for all the people. Race, religion, nationality, occupation are now totally irrelevant. I spend some time whenever I can with this text, mulling it over, staying with the phrase or word which strikes me. I use my imagination to see the Magi as they arrive at the house, I wonder what they will have thought, what they had been expecting, what frame of mind they were in. I ponder on their following the star. Whose star have I been following in my life? Perhaps I focus on the gifts they bring. What gift can I offer? I stay with the feelings this evokes in me. When I am ready I speak to the Lord about them. I listen to him and remain in silent adoration. When I am ready I become present to my own surroundings again. Do I find that, like the Magi, I have taken a different way back?

