



THE LORD'S DAY

3rd Sunday of Advent (Year C)

The Watermead Apostolate offers this weekly newsletter as a helpful guide and background to the readings used at our Catholic Mass each Sunday. Watermead began in 1992 as a voice for people who wish to share understanding of living their faith through their various God-given gifts and talents. We frame these gifts by publishing them as books, cards and resources - and we record and publish the music. We also arrange retreats and pilgrimages.

For information about the work of our apostolate, to download our resources or to offer newsletter contributions, do feel welcome to contact us at:

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First Reading

Zephaniah 3 : 14-18

We believe this book was written late in the 6th century BC. Its message is one of the Day of the Lord - who will ask for a reckoning from Judah and from the nations.

The book opens with oracles against Judah, goes on to judge the pagan nations and then Jerusalem. But in chapter 3 the mood changes. The Lord promises to convert the pagans and thus bring peace to God's little ones - the Anawim, in whose name Mary sings in the Magnificat. Their joy is today's reading. Peace is restored to Jerusalem, Zion (the hill of God on which the Temple was built) rejoices because the Almighty has returned to his dwelling place, and is king in place of the corrupt rulers of history.

The Lord will dance with joy in love for the people who are freed from fear and celebrate days of festival. Even the prophet sings, rejoicing that the Lord is preparing the time for freedom and healing.

Wisdom from the Saints



"The Lord blesses the feet
of his little ones"

Book of Samuel

Second Reading

Philippians 4 : 4-7

Paul's letter draws to a close (AD 56-57). He tells the people how much he misses them, his dear friends, expresses sorrow at a disagreement between Evodia and Syntyche and asks Syzygus to mediate. We know nothing of this disagreement but see Paul's sorrow that people who have helped him should be quarreling. (Ah, parish life!) In spite of their quarrel the ladies' names are in the Book of Life.

Then comes today's passage. It is as though Paul's sorrow at disagreements forces him to wish them all happiness. Let them be tolerant of difference between them, worry about nothing, trust in divine providence and fill their minds with all that is good.

Paul seems to think the time of the coming of the Lord is near (v 5) - a strong motive for peace and reconciliation. He offers himself as their model (v9) when, earlier, he had offered the peace of God (v7).

GOD'S LOVE

for the whole world ~
for the little ones "Anawim",
for the pagans
who are yet to hear of God
and for believers who live good lives

This week I shall . . .
read about Christmas . . .

Gospel Reading

Luke 3 : 10-18

John the Baptist has made a powerful impression on the people. The Messiah is to come, there must be a new beginning and God will raise new children of the promise. The whole world is to hear God's truth.

The people, the sinners, want to share in the new creation and ask John's advice and he is gentle and understanding. Greedy tax-collectors are asked to take no more than their due and cruel soldiers are told not to cause fear nor to be open to bribes.

The people sense that if sinners can be made welcome - then everyone can. They wonder if John himself can be the Messiah, forgiving sins and offering new life, and John's answer is humble. He can offer repentance and forgiveness, but the one whose way he is preparing will bring the Holy Spirit and fire - purifying them all for a new life with God.

Questions of Faith

Christmas seems to have first been celebrated in Rome in the 4th century, and from there to have spread through the Church and the Empire.

St John Chrysostom, in a Christmas sermon of 386, says that Christmas Day had been celebrated on 25th December for only 10 years ~ but in the West the celebration was much older.

The Church seems to have had two particular reasons for celebrating the birth of Christ on December 25th: (1) to counteract the Roman pagan festival of the Saturnalia which was an orgy at the dying of the year and the beginning of the new year: (2) in the year 274 the Emperor Aurelian had instituted the feast of the Invincible Sun on 25th December. The Church chose to celebrate the birth of Christ as the "Son of God" and to turn pagan feasting into Christian rejoicing.

People of God

St Anastasia. A prayer in honour of St. Anastasia used to be said in the second mass of Christmas Day, and behind that prayer is a lovely tradition. Rome celebrated Christmas Midnight mass at St. John Lateran (and, later, St. Peter's), the Pope's church; the Dawn mass at the church of St. Anastasia, and the Day mass at St. Mary Major ~ where it is believed a part of the original crib of the Christ child is kept.

This Roman tradition imitated the celebrations in the Holy Land: Midnight mass at Bethlehem, Dawn mass at Jerusalem and Day mass at Bethlehem ~ the pilgrims wending their way between the two holy places. From the Holy Land and from Rome thus spread the practice of celebrating mass three times on Christmas Day.

The church of St. Anastasia is found in what was the Greek part of the city, where people from the East came to settle in the 7th and 8th centuries. We believe that they built a church in honour of the Resurrection ~ "Anastasis" ~ and that the people of Rome misunderstood the name and took it to refer to a saint. We have no record of a St. Anastasia ~ but the beautiful name has been a popular Christian choice through the ages.