

# LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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**CHRISTMAS DAY**

**MIDNIGHT MASS**

**Luke 2:1** In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup> Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup> He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

**Luke 2:8** In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!”

## INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The birth stories are found only in Matthew and Luke, as is well known. Like all Gospel stories, they are written in the light of the resurrection. Again, like the Prologue of John, they serve to provide a Christological key to the identity of Jesus in the rest of the narrative. Again, like the Prologue, they establish a significant level of continuity with the revelation to God’s first chosen people.

Both Matthew and Luke write in dialogue with patterns and personalities from the Old Testament and, to a high degree, the writing is determined by those earlier models. While there is indeed a historical core (the Holy Family, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem), nevertheless these accounts are “parabolic” (like parables) in nature rather than history as we would understand it today.

### Thought for the day

The birth of any child is always a source of wonder, when we feel nearer the mystery of life and closer to God. In the birth of Jesus, we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see. The thrilling reality of the Word made flesh is both gift and call. In the words of the first letter of John, Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11). We are challenged to love the God we cannot see in the neighbour we can see. There can be no separation of these two realities: to love God is to love your neighbour and to love your neighbour is to love God.

**KIERAN O’MAHONY OSA -[www.tarsus.ie](http://www.tarsus.ie)**

This scene that Luke paints is not tranquil; this is a subversive setting, on the margins. It is into this mess that God comes as a homeless child. We are being invited to expect the unexpected as the scene is set for the world to be turned upside down in solidarity with the marginalised; it is in their name that the shepherds are chosen. The angels rejoice with the shepherds, the ‘highest’ and the ‘lowest’ giving glory to God together.

*Can you recall an experience of finding God hidden in the ordinary? Look back over your day. Where are the moments of light, joy or blessing?*

*The shepherds came in the name of all who are marginalised in our world, whose lives are full of struggle. We bring these people to mind tonight, in prayer before God.*

**TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper**

It is a dark night, so the story goes. Some shepherds are suddenly enveloped by a bright glow. The scene is one of grandeur: the night is lit up by what the evangelist calls *the glory of the Lord*. However, the shepherds were *terrified*. It is not the comfortable darkness that they fear, but the unexpected light. Hence the announcement begins with these words: *do not be afraid*"

We must not be surprised by those words. We too prefer to live in our accustomed darkness, because we fear the light of God. We do not want to live in the truth, but those who do not introduce more light and truth into their lives in these days, will not truly celebrate Christmas.

If Jesus is not *Good News* for us, if his gospel means nothing for us, if we do not know the joy that only God can give us, or if we reduce these events to everyone merely enjoying their property or to selfish comfortable religiosity, we will be celebrating anything but Christmas.

The only reason to celebrate is because *Today a Saviour has been born to you*. That child has not only been born to Mary and Joseph; he belongs to all of us. He is the *Saviour* of the World. He is the only one in whom we can place our final hope.. The world as we know it is not an absolute reality. Jesus Christ is the hope that the injustice that contaminates everything today will not last forever.

We may experience very fine emotions, enjoy our homes and friendships; they will give us moments of happiness. All that is fine, but that is still not Christmas. Only by the hope offered by Jesus Christ is there truly Christmas

**JOSÉ A PAGOLA - *Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year A***

### **POINTERS FOR PRAYER**

1. A child is born and the heavens break into song. Remember the celebrations you have witnessed at the birth of a child.
2. This was no ordinary child. It is the birth of the Son of God. In order to take in the implications of that we can do well to recall Meister Eckhart's reflection and ask ourselves how the birth of Jesus takes place in us:  
What good is it to me  
if the eternal birth of the divine Son  
takes place unceasingly  
but does not take place  
within myself ?  
And  
what good is it to me  
if Mary is full of grace  
and if I am not also full of grace ?
3. Something great was happening in most inauspicious circumstances. Perhaps you can recall an important development in your life that started in a very humble way.
4. The shepherds were both frightened and thrilled. Good news can sometimes be terrifying. Pregnancy and the birth of a child can give rise to both feelings. Hopefully the joy and wonder at new life outweigh the fear and apprehension. What has been your experience?

**JOHN BYRNE - *Intercom***

Luke puts his account of the birth of Jesus in the context of the rule of the Emperor Augustus. He is the ruler of the world and the one credited with bringing peace to the Empire, yet now in the humblest of circumstances a child is born whose rule derives not from military might nor economic wealth. He is the true Saviour whose birth is a cause of joy in heaven and on earth and is first announced to the disenfranchised.

**SEAN GOAN - *Let the reader understand Year A***

### **Scriptural Prayers**

*"Nothing happens before its time."* Trinitarian saying

Lord, we pray for those who are involved in lofty projects and are becoming impatient:

- parish youth leaders who are not getting co-operation;
- a new party that has won no seats in the elections;
- parents who are trying in vain to dialogue with their teenagers.

Help them to remember Mary and how when the time came for her to have her child she gave birth to a son.

She was at peace, felt no great concern that there was no room for them in the inn,

She merely wrapped her child in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger

Even in our relationship with you we concentrate on the miraculous and the extraordinary, glorify and praise you because things turn out exactly as we were told they would.

Mary teaches us on the contrary to see in every event a call to grow, a sacred word you speak to us, to be welcomed as a treasure and pondered in our hearts, reflected on and integrated into our consciousness.

Lord, help us to be more like Mary.

**MICHEL DE VEFRTEUIL - *Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels***