

# Read

Isaiah 9:1-6

Psalm 96:1-2, 2-3,  
11-12, 13

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

## LIVING THE WORD

# Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

December 24 and 25, 2022



## REFLECTION

Our media environment is saturated with stories of the unusual, the bizarre, the remarkable, the admirable, and the horrifying. Amidst this comes a push for every kind of reinvention of the self to be better, prettier, happier, “more anything,” but not ordinary.

Luke’s account of the birth of Christ asks us to rethink our fear of being “ordinary.” Despite visits from angels and a miraculous pregnancy, Mary and Joseph are still, for all intents and purposes, just another utterly ordinary couple moved about by the whims of the more powerful. In Bethlehem, they are just another couple of travelers among many, and the savior of humanity, the long-awaited Christ, is born into homelessness and laid in an ordinary trough for animal feed. Even the angelic heralds of his birth come, not to the rich and powerful, but to shepherds.

If we believe in Jesus’ divinity, then we believe that all of this is intentional—the census, the homelessness, the manger, and the choice of a welcoming committee of poor, ordinary laborers. The good news of Christ announced by choirs of angels is the good news for all. God became a baby, an ordinary person, and by doing so made the ordinary something extraordinary.



## ACTION

The angels prepared the shepherds to recognize their savior in a poor, newborn baby in a manger. This Christmas, pray for the faith to see and serve Christ in every person you encounter, no matter how ordinary or unimportant they seem.



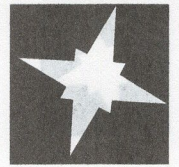
## *A Charlie Brown Christmas*

## ? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today’s readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Do you ever get down on yourself for being “ordinary”? What do you think would actually change if you stood out from the crowd more?
- ❖ How can you better appreciate the “ordinary moments” with your family or friends this Christmas season?



# CHRISTMAS TIME



## The Season

Merry Christmas! It can be sad and frustrating that Christmas Time is often lost in sentimentality, stressful family tradition, out-of-control gift giving, and the prevailing belief that it is a day, not a season. While the focus of Christmas Time is on God's great love for humanity, which requires preparation, a period of celebration, and time for reflection, it is not uncommon to hear people say how grateful they are that Christmas is over on December 26! Those who leave Christmas decorations up until the end of the season may be viewed by neighbors and friends as either lazy or unduly nostalgic! Keeping the season of Christmas is worth the misunderstanding of others, however. The Gospel passages for this season are filled with familiar stories that bear repeating. And these are stories that we grow into as time passes. While children love the story of the baby Jesus, teens and adults may find themselves grasping small details and the larger themes of the season with greater depth each year.

This holy season provides time for us to immerse ourselves in the mysteries of God's love, our responsibility for ourselves and others, and the ways in which faith and life intersect through the decisions we make, the relationships we nurture, and the impact we have on the people around us. Christmas Time truly is a blessed season; a time of grace and wonder, a moment in which to linger spiritually, with lasting impact in our lives, relationships, and the way we love, now and into the future.

## Celebrating Christmas Time with Teens

Christmas Time is a season that is filled with many emotions. Teens likely look forward to Christmas as a season they remember from the time they are very young. Like many adults, they anticipate time with family, the giving of gifts, and time away from the regular routines of school and activities. They may also approach Christmas tenderly or with anxiety if someone close has recently died, if family members are estranged, or if some are not (or no longer consider themselves) Catholic. Such situations may feel like open wounds at this time of the year. Foster open discussions among the teens to help them experience God's great love in this season of life and grace.

## Preparing the Liturgical Environment

Use Christmas white lavishly to help set the tone for your gatherings with the youth in this season. Some pine boughs and candles will add a touch of the special quality of the season. The crèche (nativity scene) is a perfect accompaniment to your Christmas prayer area, along with the Bible open to the one of the Christmas narratives or a song book with a favorite carol displayed.

Luke 2:1-14

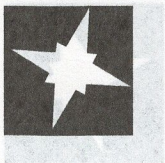
Gospel

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.





December 24 and 25, 2022

# SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS)

## LECTIONARY #15ABC

The readings are from the Mass during the Night.

Isaiah 9:1-6

Psalms 96:1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

## Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

### Leader's Context

Christmas celebrates more than the birthday of Jesus; it celebrates the tremendous gift of God's presence in the mystery of the incarnation. After our Advent season of preparation and waiting, Emmanuel has come! God is with us! Although most of Year A reads from the Gospel of Matthew, today we read the first part of the nativity of the Lord in Luke, with the census placing Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, and the angels bringing "good news of great joy" (Luke 2:10) to the shepherds in the field. Many Christians do not realize that we only read these details in Luke (whereas Matthew includes the Magi). The details that Luke includes intentionally emphasize that God chooses the poor and humble (not the rich and powerful) to receive God's favors and blessings.

**Q FOCUS:** *Christmas celebrates the mystery of the incarnation.*

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

Note the differences between the liturgical celebration of Christmas and that of the secular world. Christmas is referred to as the solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord and actually begins the liturgical season of celebration in the Church. In contrast, it's easy to feel like the secular world concludes this celebration on Christmas day. This contrast can be

seen in the Church putting up decorations such as nativity figurines, evergreens, and lights, as well as playing Christmas music. The colors of the liturgical season also change. However, instead of red and green, the vestments are white with gold, representing glory, joy, and purity. More than just a special day, the Church celebrates the mystery of the incarnation with a whole liturgical season that lasts several weeks and only begins with Christmas day.

### Church Teaching Connection

"At holy Christmas we generally exchange a few gifts with the people closest to us. At times this may be a conventional gesture, but it usually expresses affection; it is a sign of love and esteem . . . and makes us aware of the original gift of Christmas: on that Holy Night, in taking flesh God wanted to make a gift of himself to men and women, he gave himself for us; God made his Only Son a gift for us, he took on our humanity to give his divinity to us. This is the great gift" (Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, January 9, 2013).

## Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

### Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel

Luke 2:1-14

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

**All:** Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.



In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled 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 her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: / "Glory to God in the highest / and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

**Reader:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**All:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

*Everyone may be seated.*

## Reflect on the Word

*When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:*

► Have you ever asked your family about the story surrounding your birth? Where and when did it happen? What was going on in the world at that time? Who was present?

Today's Gospel begins with some of the background and context that affected the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. Due to the census, Mary and Joseph needed to travel from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem. Why is this detail important? Because about seven hundred years earlier, the prophet Micah had said that the messiah would come from the line of David, whose home was Bethlehem. We still marvel today at how God's plan is fulfilled through human action.

► As people of faith, what others call "coincidences," we see as the work of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever experienced what is sometimes nicknamed "God-incidences"? What happened (or almost happened)?

This nativity scene in the Gospel according to Luke—Mary and Joseph, Jesus in the manger, shepherds and angels—is very familiar to us. Although most nativity sets also include the "three wise men" alongside the Holy Family and the shepherds, the Magi don't actually arrive for another twelve days, on Epiphany. Plus, while the angels, shepherds, and manger scene are in Luke, they're actually not in the Gospel according to Matthew (though Matthew is the only one to include the story of the Magi). We credit St. Francis of Assisi with the idea of the nativity set, by being the first to do a "living nativity" in the thirteenth century.

► Think about the nativity scenes that you have seen, those you may have purchased or created, or those you had been a part of performing. What stands out to you?

► How do these Nativity recreations impact our faith and our understanding of Christmas?

Contemplating the incarnation has blown the minds of theologians for centuries. How can the all-powerful God become a powerless infant? How can the pure goodness of the Creator become a human being? The incarnation—that God became flesh—is a profound, mind-boggling mystery. Yet Luke spends no time discussing how. Rather, details are included that emphasize God's presence and blessing not on the powerful, but on the lowly shepherds. The proclamation of "good news of great joy" is not just for the citizens of a certain area, nor even just for the faithful of Israel, but this "good news of great



joy” is “for all the people” (Luke 2:10). Let that be our prayer today: May all people celebrate Christmas with great joy!

► How will you spread joy this Christmas season?

## Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the “Church Teaching Connection” on page 94.

**God’s plan is fulfilled through human action.**

**Nativity sets represent our faith as they recreate details found in two different Gospels.**

**The joy of Christmas celebrates the good news of the incarnation for all people.**

## Act on the Word

### Source That Song

For this activity, you will need Bibles, the lyrics to popular Scripture-inspired Christmas carols, as well as a method of playing each song, whether as live music or prerecorded music on speakers. Using your parish’s hymnal is a good place to come up with lyrics and songs; check with the parish office to see if you can borrow some for your group.

In addition to nativity sets representing two separate events in the story of Christ’s birth in one setting (even though the different details occur twelve days apart in our liturgical calendar), Christmas songs may pull from one or both stories at the same time. This activity examines the scriptural sources for many well-known songs. You may want to differentiate between religious Christmas carols and secular Christmas songs, which have no roots in the infancy narratives.

To do this activity, you will need to be able to both play and provide lyrics for each song. The lyrics can be found online, and may either be projected or printed as songbooks. The following is a list of some scripturally-sourced carols. Play them one at a time (in any order) and encourage everyone to join in caroling:

- \* Away in a Manger
- \* God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen
- \* Good Christian Men Rejoice
- \* Hark the Herald Angels Sing
- \* Joy to the World
- \* O Holy Night
- \* O Little Town of Bethlehem
- \* Silent Night
- \* The First Noel
- \* We Three Kings
- \* What Child Is This

In between each song, direct the young people to do a bit of a biblical scavenger hunt to find what specific verse in Scripture is referenced, either within Matthew 1:18—2:12 or Luke 2:1–21. It may be best to have the teens pair up, with one Bible open to Matthew and the other Luke. As the teens identify which lyrics correspond to Scripture, ask them to say the book-chapter-verse, read the whole verse aloud, and pinpoint the corresponding lyrics.

### Closing Prayer

*God of wonder,  
you created us in your image and restored  
us in Christ.  
As he humbled himself to share in our  
humanity, may we also share in  
his divinity,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity  
of the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.*

### For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday’s Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at [www.ltp.org/lwgr](http://www.ltp.org/lwgr). Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.