

PASTOR'S CORNER

Advent: First Coming and the Scandal of the Incarnation

'Incarnation' is one of those technical theological terms that now appears in the new translation of the Nicene Creed. Incarnation basically means 'enfleshment' or to become embodied. In modern usage we see the idea expressed most often in the heretical belief in re-incarnation. Reincarnation implies that the soul (or the spiritual essence of the person) pre-exists the material body and chooses to 'incarnate' sometime during gestation. As the word itself signifies, the soul will end up re-incarnating in several different bodies over the course of its earthly journey until it has reached a perfected state. Christian doctrine does not hold to this concept since we believe that the soul and body are a unity which comes simultaneously into existence at conception. The matter is that which the parents contribute through sperm and ovum. The soul is a supernatural creation of God which incarnates (or is infused seamlessly into the matter) at the moment conception occurs. The body and soul are intricately bound up with one another. It is the soul which gives the body form and life. Only at death does the soul leave aside the body and enter a purely spiritual state temporarily sustained by God until the resurrection of the dead. At that time, it will be mysteriously reintegrated with its now glorified body.

You and I are incarnated beings, since our supernatural soul and body are indivisible from the moment of our conception. To be clear, we are not souls 'in a body', but ensouled bodies (or soul-body unities). Similarly, as a human being, Jesus' soul and body came into existence simultaneously in a manner similar to our own at his conception in the womb of his mother Mary. As a divine person, however, God himself entered into union with human nature at the same instant (this is what it means to say that the 'Word became flesh'). It is at this point that language becomes strained, for the connection between God and Jesus is not adequately expressible save through words that are bound to fall short of what they purport to signify. Hence we can say that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity (who is God) is in hypostatic (personal) union with the human Jesus, without in any sense being identical, one with the other. Yet having said this, when we talk of Jesus we talk of only one person – a divine as opposed to a human one. Fused identity may not be accurate as an idea describing this mystery, but personal separateness is not either.

This is why we say formulaically that Jesus of Nazareth is both true God and true man; not two distinct entities, but one divine person. When you look upon Jesus, you look upon God himself enfleshed; God incarnate; God made man; the one God-man, Jesus. Jesus is God and Jesus is man. He who could not die and is eternal died out of love for us. He who created the universe became a creature himself. God became man, so that man (you and I) might become God (that is, being made like unto him so as to enter into communion (i.e., 'union with') him). For this reason, it is not sufficient to call Jesus simply a Prophet or a wise Rabbi, and those Christians who seek to so limit him commit the heresy of Arianism. The claims implied by our belief in the incarnation of God in Christ are far more revolutionary than that. In fact, to Jews and Muslims and atheists alike, they are scandalous.

It is not surprising that it took centuries of thought, debate and even conflict to work through this mystery in the most fundamental of ways. Many fell by the wayside: the Gnostics who believed in a complete separation of matter and spirit; the Docetists who believed that Jesus was really pure spirit and only appeared to be a man; and the Arians who, based on the teachings of the Priest Arius, believed that Jesus was a human person enlightened by the presence of God but in no way God himself. All of these heresies recur throughout the centuries because they are simply far easier to believe and understand. Nonetheless ease of understanding, when it comes to the incarnation of God in Christ, is only achieved by embracing a lie and making of Christianity a variant of either Islam or Judaism.

Properly understood, Christianity is a scandal; to paraphrase St. Paul, it is '*a stumbling block to Jews and an absurdity to everyone else*'. Christmas is that time of year when we ponder our belief that in order to save his fallen creation, God himself became incarnate of the Virgin Mary and dwelt among us. Christmas is not a birthday party,

but something far more profound and significant. It acknowledges the depth of God's love for us; that he would suffer for us in order to elevate us to his own lofty status; to make of us 'other Christ's' for his glory and honor. This is why we give gifts to one another and not to the one whose birthday is commemorated. We do so in faint echo of that one gift of love by which God has restored each one of us to the grace of holy communion. We are therefore forever indebted to both the immaculate and virginal conceptions for our salvation! Happy Advent!

Fr. Stephen Geer

Advent

| Day | Date | Time | Observance | Mass Intention |
|--------------------------|--------|----------|--|----------------------|
| VIGIL | Dec 16 | 5:00 pm | Vigil of the Sunday Eucharist | Joanna Kong + |
| SUNDAY | Dec 17 | 9:00 am | Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday) (The Holy Rosary will be prayed in the chapel at 8:30 am) | Terry Dimaculangan + |
| | | 11:30 am | Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday) | Missa pro populo |
| Monday | Dec 18 | | No service | |
| Tuesday | Dec 19 | 8:30 am | Late Advent weekday | Fr. Andrew Thomas |
| Wednesday | Dec 20 | 8:30 am | Late Advent weekday | Priest's intention |
| Thursday | Dec 21 | 8:30 am | Late Advent weekday | Priest's intention |
| Friday | Dec 22 | 8:30 am | Late Advent weekday | Millie Susnjara + |
| Saturday | Dec 23 | 8:30 am | Late Advent weekday (The Holy Rosary will be prayed in the Church at 8:00 am) | Henry Chieu Nguyen + |
| | | | Readings for the Sunday Mass: 2 Samuel 7.1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89; Romans 16.25-27; Luke 1.26-38 | |
| VIGIL | | 5:00 pm | Vigil of the Sunday Eucharist | Betty Susnjara + |
| SUNDAY | Dec 24 | 9:00 am | Fourth Sunday of Advent (The Holy Rosary will be prayed in the chapel at 8:30 am) | Margaret Schommer + |
| | | 11:30 am | Fourth Sunday of Advent | Missa pro populo |
| | | | Readings for the Nativity of the Lord: At the Vigil Mass: Isaiah 62.1-5; Psalm 89; Acts 13.16-17, 22-25; Matthew 1.1-25 | |
| CHRISTMAS EVE | | 4:00 pm | The Nativity of the Lord: At the Vigil Mass | Missa pro populo |
| | | | Readings for the Nativity of the Lord: At the Mass During the Night: Isaiah 9.1-6; Psalm 96; Titus 2.11-14; Luke 2.1-14 | |
| | | 9:00 pm | The Nativity of the Lord: At the Mass During the Night | Marylou Geer + |
| | | | Readings for the Nativity of the Lord: At the Mass During the Day: Isaiah 52.7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1.1-6; John 1.1-18 | |
| MONDAY: CHRISTMAS DAY | Dec 25 | 9:00 am | The Nativity of the Lord: At the Mass During the Day | Dustin Shawn Geer + |