

Ponder & Proclaim

*A Missionary Commentary on the
Sunday Readings*

Readings

Numbers 6:22-27
Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6+8
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:16-21

[USCCB link to the Sunday Readings](#)

The Church, in her wisdom, encourages us to begin the new year with Mary as our guide. Mary is the only person who was with Jesus even before he was born, throughout his childhood, into manhood, the beginning of his ministry, his death and resurrection, his ascension, Pentecost, and the mission of the early Church.

After giving birth, wrapping Jesus in strips of cloth – one commentator said they were rags – and keeping him warm by nestling him in a manger, Mary welcomes the shepherds.

They are in Bethlehem, the City of David. King David was the youngest of Jesse's sons. He was "tending the sheep" when Jesse called for him. Then Samuel, "in the midst of his brothers," anointed him King of Israel. The Davidic kingdom ended in 586 BCE.

Jesus comes to be the Good Shepherd and the true and lasting King. It is fitting that shepherds are the first to learn of the "Lord Messiah" and be his first witnesses. Forever the "handmaid of the Lord," Mary ponders all these wonders in her heart. She bore the Word of God in her womb. Now, she holds the salvation of humanity in and through the mission of her son, Jesus, the Son of God.

As you celebrate the blessings of 2023 and look forward to the New Year, take some time and join the shepherds, in haste, to find Jesus with Mary and Joseph in an ordinary manger among the farm animals. Be there, with them, and hear the ancient blessing with new ears, with new expectations.

The Lord bless you and keep you!

The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!

The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!

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Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

An ancient and beautiful blessing asking God to bless and keep you, to shine upon you and be gracious to you, with kindness and peace. Memorize this blessing.

Psalm

We pray simply for God's mercy, his salvation, for us and for "all the ends of the earth."

Second Reading

St. Paul underscores the phenomenal transformation God has done "in the fullness of time," changing us from creatures obeying a God beyond all names to sons and daughters, by virtue of adoption, by the salvation we have received through Jesus and his Spirit within us crying, "Abba, Father!"

Gospel

The story of Jesus' birth – indeed the birth of anyone – is not a singular event. It happens in a time, a place, a culture, and lots of people are involved. In the Gospel of Luke, the story of Jesus' is only two verses long – Mary and Joseph are in Bethlehem, she gave birth to her first-born son, wrapped him in cloth strips, and placed him in a manger because there was not room in the inn. Before the birth, we learn they are in Bethlehem, the city of David, because Ceasar has commanded a census, and this was the first.

After Jesus is born, there is the story of shepherds herding their flocks at night, the coming of an angel announcing the good news, "Today in the city of David a savior was born for you. He is Lord Messiah." An "army" of heavenly hosts join the angel praising God and proclaiming peace. When the angels left, the shepherds "make haste" to Bethlehem, they found Jesus, and shared what they heard from the angel. Everyone was astonished. Mary pondered these things in her heart. The shepherds returned to their herds praising God. After 8 days, Jesus is circumcised and receives the name "given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

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