

SUNDAY PLUS

Christmas is coming!

See the promise of Christmas

By Paul Higginson

Gaze into the crib this week and see the promise of Christmas – God completely hidden and yet completely revealed. The awesome power of God is hidden in the powerlessness of a tiny baby. God becomes weak and vulnerable in order that he might share himself and be loved by us. In Jesus, we put a face to a name. We see who God really is and we love him – not as a distant, remote figure in the highest heavens, but as a defenceless baby born into poverty, sharing a stable with farmyard animals. Matthew tells us that Jesus will be called Emmanuel which means “God is with us”. God has entered the messiness of human life and said “yes” to our flesh and blood world. From

Mince pies and Christmas pudding

Christmas and mince pies go together, but before the Reformation, they were oblong or oval in shape. The pastry base symbolised the manger, whilst the filling was the straw and the top, the swaddling clothes in which Mary wrapped the baby Jesus.


Today’s Christmas pudding is sweet and served with brandy sauce or brandy butter, but this was not always so. In medieval times, the pudding often included rabbit, poultry,

pheasant and partridge in its list of ingredients. By the end of the sixteenth century, eggs, dried fruit, breadcrumbs and brandy were added to thicken and flavour the mixture. The Christmas pudding traditionally had thirteen ingredients to represent Jesus and the twelve apostles. It was only in 1714, during the reign of King George I that meat disappeared from the recipe. He also introduced the custom of pouring brandy over the pudding and setting it alight, apparently reminding the eaters of Jesus’ passion, whereas the holly decoration represents the crown of thorns.

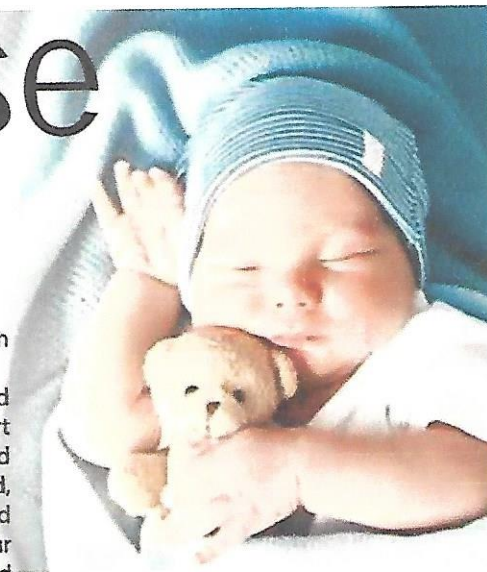
After the angel’s annunciation, a difficult period loomed ahead for the Virgin: her unexpected pregnancy exposed her to misunderstandings and even severe punishment, including stoning, in the culture of that time. Let us imagine how many concerns and worries she had! Nevertheless, she did not become discouraged, she was not disheartened: but she arose. She did not look down at her problems, but up to God. And she did not think about whom to ask for help, but to whom to bring help. She always thought about others.

now on Christ will always be by our side and glimpsed in all we meet.

Perhaps there’s no room in our inn for God? But God comes anyway and tells us it’s never too late to start again. The crib is a place of great hope: where crooked paths are made straight, where messy lives are untangled, weary hearts refreshed, fears for the future dispelled and tired hopes replaced with new beginnings. So, leave your worries at the stable door, draw close to the manger and let the baby Jesus into your heart. Let him stir your soul with the hope of new life. God is good, the world is good, you are good and all will be well. Rejoice and believe in the promise of Christmas!

Lord, Mary and Joseph did not have easy lives as they waited for your birth. Let me stay focused on you and look for you in everything that is happening around me at this time.  Amen.

Pope Francis



Following decades in the classroom and as a parish catechist, Paul Higginson is finding that retirement gives him even more opportunities to support his parish.

Feast of the week
Monday 19 December

Martyrs of the Spanish Civil War

The Carmelite church in Toledo, Spain, has ten small red boxes underneath the altar, the remains of the community members killed together during the Spanish Civil War.

Between 1936 and 1939 during the “Red Terror”, an estimated thirteen bishops, 4,172 diocesan priests and seminarians, 2,364 monks and friars and 283 nuns died. Some sources suggest that 112,000 lives were lost during the persecution. Perhaps 35,000 people lie in mass graves.

Did the executions – often following torture – happen for political or religious reasons, or a mixture of both? As in any civil war, it was a complex scenario, generating countless questions for many years to come. Certainly, the topic of the Spanish Civil War is a raw or a barely healed wound throughout Spain.

In 2007, the Vatican beatified 498 priests killed by the Republican army. Pope Francis beatified 522 martyrs on 13 October 2013, at Tarragona, Spain, and the beatification process for about 2,000 others has already begun.

Blessed Martyrs of the Spanish Civil War, pray for us!

Today Isaiah 7:10-14 Romans 1:1-7 Matthew 1:18-24	Monday Judges 13:2-7 24-25	Tuesday Isaiah 7:10-14 Luke 1:26-38	Wednesday Song of Songs 2:8-14 1:24-28 Luke 1:39-45	Thursday 1 Samuel 1:24-28 Luke 1:46-56	Friday Malachi 3:1-4 23-24 Luke 1:57-66	Saturday Mass in the Morning: 2 Samuel 7:1-5 8-12 14, 16 Luke 1:67-79	Next Sunday Vigil Mass: Isaiah 62:1-5 Titus 3:4-7 Acts 13:16-17, 22-25 Matthew 1:1-25	Mass During the Night: Isaiah 9:1-7 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14	Mass at Dawn: Isaiah 62:11-12 Titus 3:4-7 Luke 2:15-20	Mass During the Day: Isaiah 52:7-10 Hebrews 1:1-6 John 1:1-18
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