

Christmas – it's a long story

The birth of Jesus followed centuries and centuries of waiting by the people of Israel. The passage below from Isaiah establishes the family line from which the Messiah will be born. Jesse was the father of David, so the infant Jesus was to be a descendent of King David.

As well as making this link, the passage describes the qualities of the Messiah – what we now identify as the gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed, followed by the capacity of this child to rule with justice, then the final section describes the reign of God in our world – a world of peace and right relationships, of a kind we can barely imagine. This is our source of hope, the promise that the Messiah, the Saviour would be sent from God.

Little did the author of Isaiah realise that the Messiah would not only be a descendent of King David, but would be the Son of God, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas...

Foretelling the birth of the Messiah

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see
or decide by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor
and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.



The Jesse Tree from the Spinola Hours. Master of James IV of Scotland Flemish, Bruges and Ghent or Mechelen, 1510-1520

To ponder: What images arise for you from this description of the reign of God? A world with no danger? No evil? No selfishness? No exploitation of people or nature? God is promising a lot!!! What does peace look like, feel like, in your dreams? Ask God to build your hope that this is possible when God is involved. And ponder how you, one person, can contribute to the reign of God in your personal world...



The Birth of Jesus, Salvador Dali, 1967

*In his painting, Dali captures words from John's gospel: **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.***

The Word became flesh

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.**

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.**

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

May God preserve and bless you and grant you all the graces and special gifts reserved for this holy season.

Catherine McAuley, Letter to Frances Warde, December 1837

What child is this

What child is this, who, laid to rest
On Mary's lap, is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.

Why lies he in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The babe, the son of Mary.

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come, peasant, king, to own him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise a song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy, for Christ is born,
The babe, the son of Mary.

William Chatterton Dix, 1865

Light looked down and saw the
darkness.

'I will go there', said light.

Peace looked down and saw war.

'I will go there', said peace.

Love looked down and saw hatred.

'I will go there', said love.

So He, the Lord of Light,

The Prince of Peace,

The King of Love,

Came down and crept in beside us.

John Bell