

# HEARERS OF THE WORD

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16; Psalm 89 (88); Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

## The child to be born will be holy

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The Annunciation to Mary is unique to Luke's gospel. Three of the Gospels enjoy an extended prologue, Luke 1-2, Matthew 1-2 and John 1. All three are explorations of the identity of Jesus before the Gospel narrative proper begins. The exploration is always in dialogue with Old Testament patterns and precedents.

### KIND OF WRITING

#### *Annunciation*

An annunciation type-scene follows a predictable pattern. The basic pattern is

well-recognised:

1. Appearance of an angel
2. Fear / prostration
3. Reassurance
4. Message
5. Objection
6. Sign

#### *The Future of Accomplishments of the Child*

2 Samuel 7:9, 13-14, 16. Cf. also Psalms 2:7 and 89:29; Isaiah 11:1-2; 4:2-3; 2 Samuel 7:14

#### *The Portrait of Mary*

Compare Mark 3:20-21 with Luke 11:14-16; and Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21. Compare Mark 6:4 and Luke 4:24. Mary is a figure of faith after the model of Abraham.

### OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

First of all, the story belongs to a type of story familiar from elsewhere in the Bible—Ishmael, Isaac, Samson, John the Baptist and even Jesus again in Matthew are all born as a result of a special intervention from on high. The pattern of these tales is noticed below. Whenever you have a pattern like this, the thing to look out for is how the pattern is being used in this concrete instance—where is it predictable and familiar? Where is it new and different?

### NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

We explore within Luke-Acts echoes of themes enunciated here. The abundance of cross references—verging on the pedantic—serves to make the point.

The *joy of salvation* is a large theme in Luke-Acts (Luke 1:14, 28; 2:10; 6:23; 8:13; 10:17, 20; 13:17; 15:5, 7, 10, 32; 19:6, 37; 22:5; 23:8; 24:41, 52; Acts 5:41; 8:8, 39; 11:23; 12:14; 13:48, 52; 15:3, 23, 31; 23:26).

*Grace and being graced* (Luke 1:28, 30; 2:40, 52; 4:22; 6:32-34; 17:9; Acts 2:47; 4:33; 6:8; 7:10, 46; 11:23; 13:43; 14:3, 26; 15:11, 40; 18:27; 20:24, 32; 24:27; 25:3, 9).

### Thought for the day

The season of preparation is drawing to a close. Like Mary, our getting ready involves deep listening to what God is asking of me *now* and an interior willingness to say "let what you have said be done to me." What is God asking of me now, as a person, in the family, at work, and indeed within the faith community of the Church? Have I noticed a pattern of "nudges" from God calling me to a deeper, perhaps different engagement as a disciple? Are my gifts—tokens of God's grace—fully at the service of my neighbour?

### Prayer

Great and loving God, open my ear to your word, open my heart to your call, open my life to your service. Give us all the strength to live according to the Good News of your Son, Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

*David* is frequently evoked (Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4, 11; 3:31; 6:3; 18:38-39; 20:41-42, 44; Acts 1:16; 2:25, 29, 34; 4:25; 7:45; 13:22, 34, 36; 15:16)

*Jacob* too is recalled in the Gospel and Acts (Luke 1:33; 3:34; 13:28; 20:37; Acts 3:13; 7:8, 12, 14-15, 32, 46).

*Do not be afraid* (Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; 5:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32; Acts 18:9; 27:24)

The *Holy Spirit* has a vast presence in Luke-Acts (Luke 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25-26; 3:16, 22; 4:1; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12; Acts 1:2, 5, 8, 16; 2:4, 33, 38; 4:8, 25, 31; 5:3, 32; 6:5; 7:51, 55; 8:15, 17, 19; 9:17, 31; 10:38, 44-45, 47; 11:15-16, 24; 13:2, 4, 9, 52; 15:8, 28; 16:6; 19:2, 6; 20:23, 28; 21:11; 28:25).

*Servant*—male or female—is an important image across Luke-Acts (Luke 1:38, 48 [from the Magnificat]; 2:29; 7:2-3, 8, 10; 12:37, 43, 45-47; 14:17, 21-23; 15:22; 17:7, 9-10; 19:13, 15, 17, 22; 20:10-11; 22:50; Acts 2:18; 4:29; 16:17).

### ST PAUL

From Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called

to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. This gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son who was a descendant of David with reference to the flesh, who was appointed the Son-of-God-in-power according to the Holy Spirit by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we have received grace and our apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of his name. You also are among them, called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all those loved by God in Rome, called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! (Romans 1:1-7)

**BRIEF COMMENTARY**

**Verse 26** The sixth month is that of Elisabeth’s pregnancy, as noted later. Gabriel describes himself earlier: *The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.”* (Luke 1:19) The *Book of Jubilees* 16:12 (a non-canonical text) tells us that it was in the sixth month of the year that Sarah became pregnant.

**Verse 27** Virginitly was considered an unfulfilled and unfortunate state. Joseph is a conscious echo of the Joseph of Genesis. It is important for early Christians that Jesus is of the house of David—this is found not only in the gospels but also in Paul—Romans 1:3. The name “Mary” from the Hebrew Miriam means rebellion. This name has significance when you read the Magnificat politically.

**Verse 28** Literally, it would be a verb, “graced.”

**Verse 29** This marks the second stage of the type-scene, that of fear and puzzlement.

**Verse 30** This is also a standard part of the formula. Many, many people in the Bible are told “not to be afraid”: Gen 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; 35:17; 43:23; 46:3; 50:19; Ex 14:13; 20:20; Num 21:34; Deut 7:18 etc. All of this echoes Isa

7:14.

**Verse 31** This echoes what was said of John the Baptist: *Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.* (Luke 1:13).

**Verses 32-33** This is the message—the language is interesting: royal in three senses—sonship, descendant of David, kingdom. The early Christians were keen to express continuity with the Israelite/Jewish past, as a mark of God’s continued faithfulness. The last line of v. 33 has found its way into the Creed.

**Verse 34** This is a strange objection, because we all know how babies are born. Objections elsewhere in these stories are advanced age and infertility. In a way, the birth of John the Baptist is really patterned on the Old Testament annunciations, while the birth of Jesus (here) is something extraordinarily new, signalled by the virginal conception.

**Verse 35** The Holy Spirit, who inaugurates the new age—in Pentecost, in Jesus’ first sermon (Luke 4), and first of all in his birth. “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13)

**Verse 36** The proof is offered practically (Elizabeth) and theologically (God). Notice the joining of the two causes of Elizabeth’s childlessness: too old and, in any case, not able to have children.

**Verse 37** The creator’s actions are inscrutable. This echoes God’s challenge in Genesis 18:14: Can anything said by God be impossible?

**Verse 38** On “here I am”, see Genesis 22:1; 46:2; Exodus 3:4; 1 Samuel 3:4-16; Psalm 40:7; Isaiah 6:8. At this point, Mary is the exemplary “hearer of the word.”

**POINTERS FOR PRAYER**

1. “Greetings, favoured one. The Lord is with you”. We are all favoured ones and God is with us. Sometimes we are more aware of this than others. How have you

experienced being a favoured person, one blessed by God? How have you experienced God’s presence? Who has been Gabriel to you...a messenger of good news?

2. “Do not be afraid.” Mary was perplexed by the words of the angel. Perhaps you too have sometimes been perplexed by life’s path and wondered what it all meant. Perhaps at times you have doubted if God was really with you. In your troubled moments who has been an “angel” helping to lower your anxiety?

3. The angel told Mary that it was through her fruitfulness that she would realise the truth of the greeting. New life would come into being through her, and it would be through the Spirit of God working in her. How and where have you experienced yourself as a source of life for others? Have you at times had the sense that the Spirit of God was at work in you?

4. Mary was taken by surprise by the invitation, but she did not tell the angel she was not ready, nor ask him to return later. She was prepared to go with the invitation even though it was not the “right moment.” “Here I am Lord.” What invitations have come to you at the “wrong time” and how have you responded.

5. Mary’s response serves as a model for us—as one saying “yes” to what life offers. What is it like for you to say “yes” to life? Perhaps at this moment in your life you are being invited to say “Here I am, Lord”?

**PRAYER**

Here in our midst, O God of mystery, you disclose the secret hidden for countless ages. For you we wait; for you we listen.

Upon hearing your voice may we, like Mary, embrace your will and become a dwelling fit for your Word.

Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Advent Readings				Themes	
<b>Advent 1</b>	Is 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8	Ps 80 (79)	1 Cor 1:3-9	Mk 13:33-37	End of Time
<b>Advent 2</b>	Is 40:1-5, 9-11	Ps 85 (84)	2 Pet 3:8-14	Mk 1:1-8	John the Baptist
<b>Advent 3</b>	Is 61:1-2, 10-11	Magnificat	1 Thess 5:16-24	Jn 1:6-8, 19-28	John the Baptist
<b>Advent 4</b>	<b>2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16</b>	<b>Ps 89 (88)</b>	<b>Rom 16:25-27</b>	<b>Lk 1:26-38</b>	<b>Mary</b>

# To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever!

Romans 16:25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that had been kept secret for long ages, 26 but now is disclosed, and through the prophetic scriptures has been made known to all the nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory forever! Amen. (NET)

## INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The Jerusalem Bible (but not the Revised New Jerusalem Bible) sensibly makes three sentences of this elevated and dense passage. In the original, however, it is a single, somewhat awkward sentence, bringing Romans to a close on a synthetic note. However, it would appear that these verses do not come from the hand of the apostle himself but seem to be a later addition. Nevertheless, these verses to summarise the whole letter.

## KIND OF WRITING

This is a doxology, a liturgical formula giving glory to God. These may be found elsewhere in the New Testament, especially in the Deutero-Pauline letters, and are typical of later Christian usage. The whole doxology is either lacking or located elsewhere (after 14:23 or 15:33) in other early manuscripts and most likely is not original to the letter. This does not mean it is not part of Scripture; it simply means that the boundary between text and tradition in antiquity was more fluid than we usually permit ourselves to imagine.

The present doxology may have entered the tradition in a special context. Marcion (c. AD 85—c.160), mutilated the letter to the Romans to fit his anti-Jewish opinions. As part of the church response, later Paulinists inserted this doxology to counter Marcion. Traces of his supersessionism (the idea that Christianity *displaces* Judaism) are countered by the affirmation of continuity with the prophetic writings. See the editorial adjustments below.

## ORIGIN OF THE READING

The context of the Roman letter is clear enough. Paul wrote to the Romans *before*

his final journey to Jerusalem to advise them on how to live together harmoniously. The presenting issue was conflict over how much of the LAW should be observed / retained / set aside, with Christians of Jewish and Gentile extraction taking up opposing positions.

The context of the final doxology (our verses) seems to be different, reflecting a crisis triggered by Marcion, who radically separated the Old Testament from the New Testament, Judaism from Christianity. In pursuit of that, he reduced the emerging New Testament to ten letters of Paul (edited) and a version of the Gospel according to Luke (edited). He rejected the Jewish Scriptures entirely. This truly radical dichotomy between the Old and New Testaments was rejected as heretical (although such an impulse may still be felt at popular level).

Scholars have traced a potential Jewish form of the original, as follows, with later Christianising insertions in brackets:

*To him who is able to strengthen you [according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ]*

*According to the revelation of the mystery*

*Kept silent for long ages; [now manifest through the prophetic writings]*

*According to the command of the eternal God*

*Made known to the obedience of faith; [to all Gentiles]*

*To the only wise God [through Jesus Christ]*

## RELATED PASSAGES

*Examples of similar doxologies*

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20–21)

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17)

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his

glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:24–25)

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

## BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 25** Traces of genuine Pauline terminology are given a new context by the later language of orthodoxy (strengthen, revelation, mystery). “According to the proclamation (kerygma) of Jesus Christ” is found nowhere else in the New Testament. Paul is thus yoked to later concerns.

**Verse 26** Again some genuinely Pauline terms are juxtaposed with the later language of emerging orthodoxy. At the later time, Christian *leaders* were referred to as prophets (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; Rev 18:20; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 16.2). 2 Peter 3:16 refers to Paul’s letters as “writings.” All the nations must include Jews as well, according to Romans 9–11 and the theme enunciated in Romans 1:16–17.

**Verse 27** God is wise because he has only now disclosed the secret of the mystery. The final phrase, literally from aeons to aeons, shifts the eschatological timeframe indeterminably.

## POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. If you were to compose your own doxology, what would you include in your praise and thanksgiving to God?
2. The excitement of discovery is evident in these verses. When did you find yourself suddenly alive to the message of the Gospel? How are you today?
3. Living discipleship means attending to God’s word and the promptings of the Spirit. Prayer: Lord, may your word penetrate my heart and change my life.

## PRAYER

God, we stand before the mystery of your being, in wonder and awe. You are greater than that our hearts and yet we can love you in the Holy Spirit. You are greater than our minds, and yet we can know you in Jesus Christ.

Draw us every more deeply into your being that we come to that fulfilment which alone satisfies the longings of the human heart. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Your house shall be made sure forever before me

2 Sam 7:1 Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” 3 Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.”

4 But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: 5 Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 8 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; 9 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This reading is one of the key texts of the Hebrew Bible, for Jews first of all but also for Christians. It forms the background to later hopes for a future David-like king and eventually the background for the early Christian identification of Jesus as a descendant of David (see Romans 1:3). It forms an appropriate passage to reflect upon as we approach the birth of “David’s son.” The full 2 Samuel 7 should be read to make sense of it all.

### KIND OF WRITING

The passage is full of royal ideology, but there is also a prophetic voice. Nathan has a very important role here, in 2 Samuel 12 and again in 1 Kings 1. Nathan makes David stop short of (literally!) domesticating God. At the same time, there is a powerful expression of God’s own faithfulness.

### ORIGIN OF THE READING

The passage is a fairly straightforward narrative, taking from the second book of Samuel. There are really just two speeches, a short one by David and a much longer one by God. According to the text, David had just brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, his capital. That was clearly a very political move. Before that, God’s presence—symbolised by the ark—went with the people wherever they wandered, a kind of itinerant “God of the open spaces” (one possible meaning of *El Shaddai*). By taking to himself the symbol of God’s presence, David increased his power and control over people. Psalm 132 captures very much the same royal theology of the house of David

### RELATED PASSAGES

As for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised your father David, saying, “There shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel.”

“If you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut Israel off from the land that I have given them; and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a taunt among all peoples. (1 Kings 9:4–7)

Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David. (Psalms 122:3–5) Cf. Psalm 132:13–17 for the ark of the covenant.

### BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 1** A rare moment of respite in the bellicose career of David.

**Verse 2** An implied intention.

**Verse 5** A rhetorical question, followed in the omitted text by a description of God as itinerant, always “with” his wandering people. The tone in the next verse (not in our reading) is sarcastic really – does God *need* a house?

**Verse 8** Evoking the call of David in 1 Sam 16:11.

**Verse 9** “Being with you” is almost a name for God in the bible.

**Verse 10** A future promise based on past reality.

**Verse 11** God reviews the history of the Israelites. Punning on the word house (meaning also, as in English, dynasty) God turns the tables on David.

**Verse 16** This promise lays the foundation of Jewish and later Christian hopes that God would send a descendent of David to shepherd his people again.

### POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The domestication of God is always a risk for believers, even though we know he is greater than our hearts and kinds. Remember the moments when the sheer otherness of God was particularly real for you.

2. Another name for God in the Bible could be Ever Faithful. When have I been aware, in spite of all that was going on, that, yes, God was beside me all along. Thanksgiving.

3. The ark, symbol of God’s roving presence, shows God not at all bound by structures, where real or virtual, architectural or ecclesiastical. Hence we may say, in faith, that God is present to us fully, always, everywhere, no matter what. We are not always conscious of this and then, in certain moments, we are. Amen.

4. His kingdom will have no end – a prayer we say every Sunday in the creed. The kingdom of God in Jesus’ proclamation grounds all our hope.

### PRAYER

God ever faithful, show yourself again as constant love, always with us, even when we are not with you. Teach us to build our hopes on your foundations, that by setting aside our limited vision we may never take you for granted. We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

# THE LITURGY

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16; Psalm 89 (88); Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

## THEMES ACROSS THE READINGS

The reading is essential background for the Annunciation, which mentions David explicitly in vv. 27 and 32 (v.33 his kingdom will last forever). The theme of God's fidelity to David (and his house) is a way of speaking of God's continued faithfulness and the continuity of God's revelation in Jesus. That is why David is so important in the NT.

Without even trying to be pedantic (!), here is the full list of occurrences of "David." It may remind us of our Jewish roots. Matt 1:1, 6, 17, 20; 9:27; 12:3, 23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42-43, 45; Mark 2:25; 10:47-48; 11:10; 12:35-37; Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4, 11; 3:31; 6:3; 18:38-39; 20:42, 44; John 7:42; Acts 1:16; 2:25, 29, 31, 34; 4:25; 7:45; 13:22, 34, 36; 15:16; Rom 1:3; 4:6; 11:9; 2 Tim 2:8; Heb 4:7; 11:32; Rev 3:7; 5:5; 22:16.

## THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 89 (88) is an extensive royal Davidic psalm, being some 52 verses long. It is a song thanking God for his faithful love. The lectionary doesn't use the whole psalm (too long), but here are the verses that mention David by name and by title.

You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant *David*: 'I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said: "I have set the crown on *one who is mighty*, I have exalted one chosen from the people. I have found my servant *David*; with my holy oil I have anointed him; my hand shall always remain with him; my arm also shall strengthen him. Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to *David*?" (Psalms 89:3-4, 19-21, 49)

## SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

### First reading

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16

This important reading makes its point with wittily. King David wanted to build God a house, meaning a temple; God refuses but promises instead to build him

a house, meaning dynasty to which God will always be faithful. Remember we are told in Matthew, that Joseph was "of David's house and line". In today's Gospel, Luke says the same.

### Second reading

Romans 16:25-27

How you end a piece of writing is just as important as the start and today we have the very last verses of the great letter to the Romans. After all the complicated argument, Paul opens his heart in prayer.

### Gospel

Luke 1:26-38

Our attention falls naturally on the interaction between Mary and the angel. To hear is afresh, perhaps you might listen out for what is said about the baby to be born, whose birth we mark next Thursday.

## WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

### Friday 25 CHRISTMAS DAY

See special notes for Christmas Day.

### Saturday 26 December

St Stephen, the first martyr

Acts 6:8-10, 7:54-59

As you listen, you may notice in the account of Stephen's death many echoes of Jesus' death in Luke's Gospel, such as praying for his enemies.

Matthew 10:17-22

It is clear from Matthew's Gospel that becoming and being a Christian sometimes caused tremendous family upheaval. But the message is reassuring: in the moment of testing, the Holy Spirit will be with you.

### Wednesday 27 December

St John, apostle and evangelist

There is a consensus in critical biblical suites that the apostle and the evangelist are two different persons. For some, this may be news and perhaps a shock. For others, it means we celebrate twice!

1 John 1:1-4

This passage from the first letter of John

is very poetic and uplifting. It reminds us a little of the prologue of the Gospel of John.

John 20:2-8

Readers will notice the start contrast between the reactions of Peter and that of the Beloved Disciple. The Beloved Disciple is symbolic, showing that the "charismatic" arrives more quickly at the truth

### Thursday 28 December

Holy Innocents

1 John 1:5-2:2

Our reading today is both highly spiritual—God is light—and immensely practical—we all do sin.

Matthew 2:13-18

The tragic note struck by this story in Matthew's Gospel reminds us that Christmas is also about the cross. The writer echoes the birth of Moses as well as the history of the Exile in Babylon.

### Friday 29

St Thomas à Beckett

1 John 2:3-11

How old and how new is the Gospel? The command to love is hardly new as such—see Deut 6:4-6. But it is newly possible in the light of Jesus' resurrection and the gift of the Spirit.

Luke 2:22-35

Today we hear a delightful vignette of the best of Jewish piety. Simeon—one of the few old people in the New Testament—is a model of piety and faith.

### Saturday 30 December

1 John 2:12-17

The reading addresses the hearers directly but needs careful handling. The "world" does not mean creation as such but whoever in creation is opposed to God.

Luke 2:36-40

Matching the story of Simeon, we hear the story of Anna, daughter of Phanuel. She too is a model of Jewish piety and trust in God. As a prophetess, she proclaims Jesus to all who long for deliverance.