

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16.
Response: *"I will sing forever of your love, O Lord"* (Ps. 88:2)
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 88: 2-5, 27, 29
Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27
Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

Jesus is the living risen Lord. He is Emmanuel, God with us. He is the eternal word of God through the ages, the Word become flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of whom Isaiah prophesied. And so we hymn:

*"A girl was born in Nazareth
of David's royal line,
the maid of whom Isaiah spoke,
raised up to be a sign."* (J. Smith)

The Readings today takes us on a journey through the ages, showing the mystery of God's Word in action. It takes us back with God's prophetic word to Nathan promising *"I will provide a place for my people Israel"* (2 Sam. 7:10).

God tells his people they will be saved, safe. *"You will always stand secure before me"* (2 Sam. 7:16).

And God will keep His promise. *"Of this I am sure that your love will last forever"* (Ps. 88:2). Knowing the prophecies and trusting in God's fulfilment of his word, with joyful hearts, we proclaim *"I will sing forever of your love, O Lord"* (Ps. 88:2).

For St. Paul, the great truth of our faith, *"the mystery which was kept secret for endless ages, is now made clear"* (Rom. 16:25), challenges us to *"live the Good News"* (Rom. 16:25).

The Good News is the *ἄγγελος*, *Kerygma*, the proclamation that the Risen Lord is in our midst. The story begins with the Incarnation, how *"the Holy Spirit comes upon Mary"* (Lk. 1:35) who is to *"conceive and bear a son, and name him Jesus"* (Lk. 1:31).

The name 'Jesus' means 'Yahweh is salvation'. He is incarnate in the Virgin's womb. *"The child will be holy and will be called the Son of God"* (Lk. 1:32). The Good News is salvation is at hand.

Salvation happens because a humble virgin in the midst of fallen humanity, submits to the Holy Spirit, becoming the bridge by which the Son of God can come as man.

*"Man's ancient sin had sundered deep
a chasm that none could span:
Her sweet submission built the bridge
God walked across to man."*

The Spirit that comes down upon Mary, comes down on us today. Mary as a model of the Church, exemplifies the action of God in us, empowering us to bring Christ to the world.

Reflect upon the Gospel of the day. Listen to the message of the angel revealing how Mary is to bear the Son of God. The Lord will become flesh in her womb. Thus is she proclaimed as a 'Tabernacle of the Most High,' her title revealed at her shrine in *Ngome*, in Zululand.

In the Eucharist, the mystery of Christ continues, in his Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle on the altar, and Really Present, *Shekinah*, in the People of God

The Blessed sacrament is a means of Christ coming to you who are also living tabernacles. He is more present than in a burning bush, he is living in you, an *alter Christus*. (Doctrine)

St. Augustine tells us that long before Word became flesh in Mary's womb, she carried the word of God in her heart. What better way to celebrate Christmas than to live the Word. Be like Mary, a tabernacle, bearing the presence of Christ to the world. Bring good news by living it. (Witness)

FOR THE CHILDREN

At the *Ngome* shrine of Our Lady, Mary is called 'Tabernacle of the Most High.'

What is a tabernacle, in the Bible?

In Christmas we see God giving us his most precious gift, his Son. In the Eucharist, Christ's Mass (*Christmas*), we accept the Son: with him, in him and through him, offer the gift of ourselves. (Liturgy)



Discuss and explain what the angel was saying to Mary in the Gospel, and what Mary said. (Teaching)

Advent is a preparation for Christmas, for the coming of the Lord. Let us prepare ourselves as a tabernacle making Christ present to the world. (Witness)

FOR TEENAGERS (*Shared Christian Praxis*)

My Present Action: ***See any connection between building the Ark and Advent?***

Your Story and Vision: ***How do you prepare yourself for the Lord?***

Church's Story: Consider the Church's role regarding Advent and preparations.

Church's Story and Your Story: ***How does your experience and attitude compare to what Advent means for the Church?***

Your Vision and Church's Vision: ***How do you envisage yourself with the Lord and deepening your relationship with him and with His Church?***

RCIA

Jesus, Son of the Most High and son of Mary, expresses his divinity and humanity. He is true God and true man.

"In Mary, the Holy Spirit manifests the Son of the Father, now become the Son of the Virgin. She is the burning bush of the definitive theophany. Filled with the Holy Spirit she makes the Word visible in the humility of his flesh. It is to the poor and the representatives of the gentiles that she makes him known."⁽ⁱ⁾

From five hundred years ago we still behold Mary in a supernatural painting in the *tilma* (mantle) and powerfully still, her words ring out from Guadalupe through the ages: "Am I not your Mother?" and "Are you not in the folds of my mantle and in the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?"⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

(i) **CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.** 724.

(ii) **JOHNSTON** Francis. **The Wonder of Guadalupe.** *Tan Books & Publishers.* Rockford, Illinois. 1981. p.136.

LIFE EXPERIENCE

While pondering on the Blessed Virgin Mary as a model of mother and wife, reminded me of the missionary trying to convert a Zulu who had six wives.

"You can keep only one and tell the others they have to go." the missionary said.

The convert was silent, thought about it for a while, then said: "Me wait here. You go, tell them."

'*Wobuya nequbu likanogwaja*,' is a Zulu proverb, meaning you are in for reaping only the fur of a rabbit; and indeed fur maybe sparks will fly.

LITTLE ANGELINA

We were planning a pilgrimage to Israel and Egypt. Angelina's parents were interested. And what about Angelina who wanted to go as well? Her parents objected, stating that she was only a child.

"Jesus was a child when he went to Egypt," was her response.

Her parents could have said that he was the Son of the Most High.

And I suppose Angelina could have answered "And I am a daughter of the Most High." *Ex ore infantium?*, out of the mouth of babes (*Mt. 21:16*).

IMPORTANT WORD: "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32)

Jesus, the son of Mary, is the Son of *El Elyon*, the Most High. *El Elyon* is one of the most ancient names of God, revealed to Abraham, long before He revealed himself as *Yahweh*, to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In Abraham's time people were believing in many gods. For Abraham, the true God is the Most High, Supreme God, the Almighty, *El Shaddai*. Interestingly, Abraham went to a priest of the Most High God who offered bread and wine. His name is Melchizedek who is seen as a type (*typos*: meaning allegory, figure or shadow) of Christ. Josephus says "Melchizedek signifies the king of righteousness, the priest, who provides food in abundance and praises God in the feast."⁽ⁱ⁾ A close connection is drawn between him, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Most High, *El Elyon*, and Abraham. Mary plays a role in the mystery too, and so do we.

(i) JOSEPHUS Flavius. *THE WORKS OF JOSEPHUS Complete and Unabridged*. 1.10.2. Translated by William Whiston. Hendrickson Publishers Inc. Peabody, MA., USA. 2008. p.39.

Watchword: "Hail, the Lord is with you" (Luke:1:28)

Hebrew: *Shalom lak, Yahweh ' immak.*

Greek: *Chaire, ho Kurios meta souc.*

Latin: **Ave, Dominus tecum.**

Portuguese: **Salve, O Senhor é contigo.**

French: **Rejois-toi, le Seigneur est avec toi.**

Afrikaans: **Ek groet jou, die Here is by jou.**

Zulu: **E! (Yethi), inKosi inawe.**

Xhosa: **Bhota, wena ubabalweyo! INkosi inawe!**

Sotho: **Itumele, Moreno o na le wena!**

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CATECHETICS

Lesson 52:

THE REASON FOR CATECHETICS (WHY WE TEACH)

At the beginning of this course we looked at a working definition of catechetics. We described it as '**God's message communicated to mankind** (people)', involving three basic questions of '**What we teach**' (God's message), '**How we teach**' (Communication), and '**Who we teach.**'

(People). Essentially it also begs the question of '**Why we teach,**' the focus being on the purpose or aim of catechesis.

The old 'Penny Catechism' (*Question 2*) says: "God made us to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him in the next." This answer is indicative of **Why we teach**, a reason for catechetics. Knowing God, loving Him and serving Him in this life is what Christian living is all about. It is an ongoing thing involving a progressive **growth in faith**, entailing encounters, conversions and commitments; a dynamic process. Thomas Groome takes this process into account in terms of time: past, present and future; not as three separate entities but a single reality of the present moment. Our living experience is in this moment which is part of a process that calls the past and reaches out to the future. Such is the dynamics of our faith. Janaan Manternach and Carl Pfeifer graphically portray in their book 'Creative Catechist', "**faith growth**" in terms of tradition, experience and process.⁽ⁱ⁾

Faith growth in terms of '**Tradition**' means looking at all that has been handed down to us from the apostles. It is the whole content of Faith that has developed from it, based on the written Word in the **Scriptures**, the celebrated Word in **Liturgy**, the Word expounded in **Doctrine** and the Word lived in our daily lives (**Witness**). All this forms part of the rich heritage of the Church.



The above is seen as the **four pillars of our faith in the Sacred Tradition of the Church**.

The living out of our faith in the experience of our daily lives is what **faith growth** is about. It entails the trinity: of God, self and neighbour, our **relationships** to one another, loving God with all our hearts and loving His children as we love ourselves. It is based on an ongoing process of discovery of meaning. This process is epitomised in Jesus, who as a human being, "advanced in wisdom, in stature and grace before God and man" (*Luke 2:52*). It is a way of living, Jesus' **way** to the Father.

Faith growth then can be described as a **process**, like a mustard seed that grows into a tree. It involves a quest, relationship, love, discernment and service, all the dynamic elements of life in the **Spirit**. **SPIRITUS EST ACTUS**. Faith is a dynamic that entails an ongoing process of conversion every day of our lives. A living faith is one that is always growing and deepens in the course of our lives.

⁽ⁱ⁾ **MANTERNACH** Janaan & **Carl PFEIFER**. **Creative Catechist**. Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, Conn., 1995.

Most importantly, the '*Creative Catechist*' was written "to help you tap your own creativity and that of those you teach. We wrote it to help you grow in faith and to increase those skills that will lead others to grow in faith with you. Creative catechesis is what creative catechists do. That is why we focus on you.

We will be more than satisfied if you discover in yourself more of the creativity already there and let it blossom so that you may become an even more creative catechist."

(Janaan Manternach & Carl Pfeifer. Opus cit. p.2.)