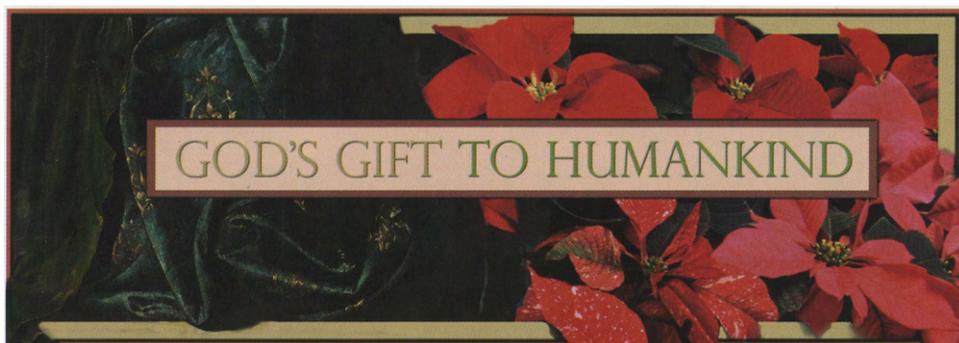


THE  
WORD



## THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

Year B

Isaiah 52:7-10

Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6

Hebrews 1:1-16

John 1:1-18

### Gathering

*(A manger scene and a crucifix are arranged on a table covered with a gold cloth. A length of red ribbon is tied in a bow at one end around the crucifix. The other end is wrapped around the manger. A wrapped gift box also rests on the table. As members arrive, the leader pins a Christmas bow on each person saying, "You are a gift.")*

Last week we pondered God's gift to Mary and Mary's gift of herself to God. This week we celebrate the mysterious gift of God incarnated for our sakes. We too, enfleshed spirits, are God's gifts to ourselves, called to be gifts for the sake of others. How did you welcome thirst into your life this past week?

### Prayer

*(The leader and members of the community light whatever candles might be part of the Christmas decoration in the place where the community is gathered. The leader invites members to be prayerfully in touch with Emmanuel, God-with-us. A selection of instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, a member of the community prays as*

*follows on behalf of all.)*

## **Christmas Prayer of Pope John XXIII**

Member: O sweet Child of Bethlehem, grant that we may share with all our hearts in this profound mystery of Christmas. Put into the hearts of men and women this peace for which [we] sometimes seek so desperately and which you alone can give....Help [us] to know one another better, and to live as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father. Reveal to [us] also your beauty, holiness and purity. Awaken in [our] hearts love and gratitude for your infinite goodness. Join [us] all together in your love and give us your heavenly peace.

*[www.churchyear.net/christmasprayers.html](http://www.churchyear.net/christmasprayers.html)*

All: Amen.

## **HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL**

*(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)*

*When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. The leader then poses these questions: “**What draws you to this gospel?**” “**Where do you resist this gospel?**” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)*

## **Reflection**

“Who do you think you are anyway – God’s gift to mankind?” My boss used to ask me this every time I’d propose something new in our department. I’d respond, “Well, of course – aren’t you?” Then we’d laugh and he’d let me go ahead, because he had come to trust me and believed that he’d be happy

with the outcome.

Like the outcome of my projects, there's something about the outcome of God's gifts that's unknowable – mysterious, if you will. Parents looking at their sleeping children know this mystery well, wondering what their tiny sleeping gifts from God will turn out to be. Parents might wonder about their own incarnation from time to time, and wonder what it all means and how things will turn out for them, too.

John gives us a glimpse of how it all works and how it will turn out. He uses the metaphor of *word* to describe the relationship of the Father and Son. When we speak, something comes to be that didn't exist just a moment ago. Through words, relationships come to be and grow. Similarly, when God utters his Word, all creation comes to be. God speaks the language of love and relationship. How will it turn out for us? John tells us we'll be happy with the outcome, *for those who accept the Word have the "power to become children of God."*

To accept the Word is to become aware that God loves us and wishes to continue the creative, redemptive work of his Son's Incarnation through God's incarnation in each and every one of us, his children. Gathered together at the Eucharist as the Body of Christ, we are nothing less than fabulously unique expressions of God's gift of Love being given right here, right now, to his people. And then, Eucharist sends us to be for others God's gifts to humankind.

### **Questions for Reflection and Conversation**

- ◆ Recall a meaningful Christmas gift you gave to someone.
- ◆ When lately have you been a gift of God's love to others?
- ◆ In what ways have others gifted you with God's love?
- ◆ How easy is it for you to see yourself as God's gift to humankind?
- ◆ How have the members of your small community been God's gift to you?

### **HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD**

*(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The*

leader then poses these questions: **“What do you hear Christ saying to us in hearing and sharing his word?”** **“What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?”** **“How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?”** After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

## Response in Action Suggestions

- ♦ Give a simple Christmas gift to someone who does not expect one from you.
- ♦ Birthright helps any girl or woman regardless of age, race, creed, marital or economic status, who feels distressed by an unplanned pregnancy. Volunteer your help. For online information about locations in your area, go to [www.birthright.org](http://www.birthright.org) or call (800-550-4900).

## Prayer

*(After a brief pause, the gospel of the week is re-proclaimed by a member of the community. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: **“What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?”** **“What do you say to him in response?”** The community pauses for a full five, perhaps even seven, minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.*

*When the sharing is complete, members join in singing, “The King Born Christmas Day.” The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, the prayer continues as follows. Members respond, “Amen” to each invocation.)*

Leader: The whole process of salvation centers on the person of Jesus Christ.

In the Son of God, the Word was God’s own life from all eternity.

Through his Incarnation, that eternal, divine life has

entered into human history and has become available right now to all who believe in the Son.

Because the Word has been made flesh and dwells among us, the last day has become the present moment.

John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol.2, pp. 810-811

All: Bounteous God, you wonderfully created and yet more wonderfully restored the dignity of human nature; grant that we may share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

[www.churchyear.net/christmasprayers.html](http://www.churchyear.net/christmasprayers.html)

*(Members exchange a sign of peace.)*

