



JESUS CHRIST

His infancy and hidden life

Texts from the

Catechism of the Catholic Church

THE PREPARATIONS

Everything converges on Christ

The coming of God's Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He makes everything converge on Christ: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the 'First Covenant'. He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel. Moreover, he awakens in the hearts of the pagans a dim expectation of his coming. (522)

'Prophet of the Most High'

St John the Baptist is the Lord's immediate precursor or forerunner, sent to prepare his way. 'Prophet of the Most High', John surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last. He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother's womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being 'the friend of the bridegroom', whom he points out as 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'. Going before Jesus 'in the spirit and power of Elijah', John bears witness to Christ in his preaching, by his Baptism of conversion, and through his martyrdom. (523)

The liturgy of Advent

When the Church celebrates *the liturgy of Advent* each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' (Jn 3:30) (524)



THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY

The eternal enters this world

Jesus was born in a humble stable, into a poor family. Simple shepherds were the first witnesses to this event. In this poverty heaven's glory was made manifest. The Church never tires of singing the glory of this night:

The Virgin today brings into this world the Eternal
And the earth offers a cave to the Inaccessible.
The angels and shepherds praise him
And the magi advance with the star,
For you are born for us, Little Child, God eternal! (Eastern Liturgy) (525)

This marvellous exchange

To become a child in relation to God is the condition for entering the kingdom. For this, we must humble ourselves and become little. Even more: to become 'children of God' we must be 'born from above' or 'born of God'. Only when Christ is formed in us will the mystery of Christmas be fulfilled in us. Christmas is the mystery of this 'marvellous exchange':

O marvellous exchange! Man's Creator has become man, born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbles himself to share in our humanity. (Evening Prayer, 1 January) (526)

JESUS' INFANCY

Circumcision

Jesus' *circumcision*, on the eighth day after his birth, is the sign of his incorporation into Abraham's descendants, into the people of the covenant. It is the sign of his submission to the Law and his deputation to Israel's worship, in which he will participate throughout his life. This sign prefigures that 'circumcision of Christ' which is Baptism. (527)

The Epiphany

The *Epiphany* is the manifestation of Jesus the Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Saviour of the world. The great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (*magi*) from the East, together with his baptism in the Jordan and the wedding feast of Cana in Galilee.

In the magi, representatives of the neighbouring pagan religions, the Gospel sees the first-fruits of the nations, who welcome the good news of salvation through the Incarnation.

The magi's coming to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations.

Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Saviour of the world only by turning towards the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament. The Epiphany shows that 'the full number of the nations' now takes its 'place in the family of patriarchs', and acquires *Israelitica dignitas* (is made 'worthy of the heritage of Israel'). (528)

The presentation in the temple

The *presentation of Jesus in the temple* shows him to be the firstborn Son who belongs to the Lord. With Simeon and Anna, all Israel awaits its *encounter* with the Saviour - the name given to this event in the Byzantine tradition.

Jesus is recognised as the long-expected Messiah, the 'light of the nations' and 'the glory of Israel', but also 'a sign that is spoken against'. The sword of sorrow predicted for Mary announces Christ's perfect and unique oblation on the cross that will impart the salvation God had 'prepared in the presence of all peoples'. (529)

The flight into Egypt

The *flight into Egypt* and the massacre of the innocents make manifest the opposition of darkness to light: 'He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.' (Jn 1:11)

Christ's whole life was lived under the sign of persecution. His own share it with him. Jesus' departure from Egypt recalls the exodus and presents him as the definitive liberator of God's people. (530)

JESUS' HIDDEN LIFE

A daily life spent without evident greatness

During the greater part of his life Jesus shared the condition of the vast majority of human beings: a daily life spent without evident greatness, a life of manual labour. His religious life was that of a Jew obedient to the law of God, a life in the community. From this whole period it is revealed to us that Jesus was 'obedient' to his parents and that he 'increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.' (Lk 2: 51-52) (531)

Family life and obedience to Joseph and Mary

Jesus' obedience to his mother and legal father fulfils the fourth commandment perfectly and was the temporal image of his filial obedience to his Father in heaven. The everyday obedience of Jesus to Joseph and Mary both announced and anticipated the obedience of Holy Thursday: 'Not my will...' The obedience of Christ in the daily routine of his hidden life was already inaugurating his work of restoring what the disobedience of Adam had destroyed. (532)

Fellowship with Jesus in the home of Nazareth

The hidden life at Nazareth allows everyone to enter into fellowship with Jesus by the most ordinary events of daily life:

The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus - the school of the Gospel. First, then, a lesson of *silence*. May esteem for silence, that admirable and indispensable condition of mind, revive in us... A lesson on *family life*. May Nazareth teach us what family life is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, and its sacred and inviolable character... A lesson of *work*. Nazareth, home of the 'Carpenter's Son', in you I would choose to understand and proclaim the severe and redeeming law of human work... To conclude, I want to greet all the workers of the world, holding up to them their great pattern, their brother who is God. (Pope Paul VI at Nazareth). (533)

The finding in the temple

The *finding of Jesus in the temple* is the only event that breaks the silence of the Gospels about the hidden years of Jesus. Here Jesus lets us catch a glimpse of the mystery of his total consecration to a mission that flows from his divine sonship: 'Did you not know that I must be about my Father's work?' Mary and Joseph did not understand these words, but they accepted them in faith. Mary 'kept all these things in her heart' during the years Jesus remained hidden in the silence of an ordinary life. (534)

IN BRIEF

- **No one, whether shepherd or wise man, can approach God here below except by kneeling before the manger at Bethlehem and adoring him hidden in the weakness of a new-born child. (563)**
- **By his obedience to Mary and Joseph, as well as by his humble work during the long years in Nazareth, Jesus gives us the example of holiness in the daily life of family and work. (564)**

