

this will be a sign for you...
Luke 2:12



retreat december 2025

Formation and Spirituality

PROVINCE OF OUR LADY OF PILAR

Luke 2:1-20

At that time, a decree was issued by Emperor Augustus ordering everyone to register in a census. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Everyone went to register, each to his own town. Joseph went from Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to the town of David in Judea, called Bethlehem, because he belonged to the house and family of David, to register with Mary, his wife, who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for Mary to give birth, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. There were shepherds in the area keeping watch over their flocks in the open air. An angel of the Lord appeared to them. The glory of the Lord surrounded them with light, and they were terrified.

The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. Behold, I bring you good news of great joy for all the people: today in the city of David a Saviour has been born, the Messiah and Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly army praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those whom he loves!

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

They hurried and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw him, they told what had been said about the child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Mary, for her part, kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

Our gaze wanders in search of the Child... fragility, defencelessness, smallness... serenity, arms seeking hugs. And then our gaze wanders to the parents... tiredness, fear, uncertainty... deep joy, arms longing to embrace. We contemplate the scene in its context, a couple of new parents who have to flee their home, passing through places where they are not welcome, alone, frightened, without many belongings, forced to face the most important moment of their lives in the worst circumstances.

Something rises in our throats that prevents us from swallowing or breathing. A mixture of contained emotion, with an aftertaste of responsibility, pride, concern, excitement, doubt... To look at a baby, a tiny child who embodies all promises, is to discover in the most fragile being the power of a whole God; to grant those who flee the good fortune of welcoming salvation is to bow down before a stranger and visualise yourself worshipping the Saviour... Christmas is a magnet that irresistibly attracts us and leaves us with no escape.

There is so much light in the smallness of Bethlehem that we cannot resist the invitation to hold our breath and set off for that remote place where our wounded world can find hope and comfort. We spend too much time analysing reports, data and statistics that explain the tragedies of our world, so today let Bethlehem be the refuge that is illuminated by the light that enters through the cracks of our inconsistencies, let our limitations be filled with symbols, gestures and songs, and lead us to see beyond the invisible.

In this History of Salvation that we are beginning again and of which we are a part, vulnerability saves and suffering can only be understood when embodied in human flesh. So much Truth wrapped in Mystery, that we are given a whole day to look at love naked and wrap it in some of that desire that we carry in our hearts and that is born in the simple, the discreet, the unnoticed. Let us draw closer once again to that marvellous event we call the Incarnation, which we can only access to the beat of the drum and with our most authentic face of wonder...

"IN THOSE DAYS" [Lk 2:1]

LET US BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

In those days, specifically when Augustus was emperor, because Jesus is not an idea, nor a fad, nor a story... Jesus is part of our history, and this is the beginning: a humble and silent presence that allows itself to be found on the margins where nothing promises and everything trembles at the beginning.

"I will leave in your midst a humble and poor people,
who will seek refuge in the name of the Lord" (Zephaniah 3:12).

He is born under an imperial edict that treats the poor as worthless pawns, born at a time, in a place and in a history marked by specific names: Augustus, Quirinius, Galilee, Bethlehem. From the beginning, God chooses to live within our limitations: displaced by the mandate of those who impose their will by force; a foreigner and a stranger, a victim of exclusionary borders; a hidden heartbeat in Mary's willingness; a silent embryo in Joseph's trust; and finally, a naked child born into the greatest poverty.

The Incarnation is the truest and most real fact of our human condition: subjugated, humiliated, questioned, weak, silent and... deeply desired and loved. The Incarnation stops us in our tracks and turns our faces towards that unexpected place where God happens:

exclusion, smallness, the un y that does not count, because the Incarnation is not found in fleeing from reality, but in entering into it, there where God has chosen to be born.

- *What areas of my life do I need to look at again in order to recognise in them the humble presence of a God who enters history not by imposing himself, but by accompanying us from within?*
- *If God chose to be born in exclusion, in limitations and fragility, what concrete realities do I feel called to today to find the place where God continues to happen?*

"WHILE THEY WERE IN BETHLEHEM" [Lk 2:6]

A TASTE FOR THE SMALL

And here it all begins... leaving the great cities of the great empires of the ancient world and Jerusalem itself turned to smoke by this fire that burns in secret:

But you, Bethlehem of Ephrath, small among the villages of Judah, from you shall come forth the one who is to be ruler of Israel: his origin is ancient, from time immemorial (Mic 5:1).

This announcement by Micah constitutes, at the very heart of the Hebrew Bible, the affirmation of a unique style: the same YHWH who asked Abraham to do the impossible; the one who parted the waters of the Red Sea and drowned the power of Pharaoh; the one who hides his face from the apparent and reveals himself to those whom no one sees, that same YHWH who bursts in where no one expects and sees the beauty hidden in a shepherd's heart, chooses the insignificant to fill it with meaning.

Bethlehem is God's whisper in history, a small place where heaven meets earth without noise. It is not large or powerful, it does not occupy the centre of empires, in its smallness, Bethlehem reveals God's way of acting:

- In the fields of Bethlehem walks Ruth, the foreigner, the faithful woman who trusts without guarantees and loves without belonging completely. From her poverty and loyalty, God opens a new story. In Bethlehem, Ruth is welcomed, redeemed and made part of the people of the promise. There, in the simplicity of everyday life, God quietly prepares the genealogy of the Messiah.
- From Bethlehem comes David, the younger brother, shepherd before king, whom no one would have chosen. Bethlehem thus becomes the cradle of a royalty born of care and trust in God rather than strength.
- In Bethlehem, the promise is fulfilled once again: from the house of David, from the tribe of Judah, Jesus is born. Not in a palace, but in Bethlehem [בֵּית לֶחֶם], the "house of bread", God becomes Bread for the life of the world.

Bethlehem teaches us that God does not abandon simple stories, that He is born where hearts are open, where faith walks without certainty, where smallness offers itself as a space for the divine.

- *Where do I perceive God's preference today for the small, the hidden, and the unnoticed, and how does that invite me to look at my own life from a more humble and truthful place?*
- *If the entire Scripture seems to patiently gestate the coming of Jesus, what is God gestating in me through the slow processes, the waiting, the absences and the silences that I do not always understand?*

"THIS WILL BE A SIGN FOR YOU" [Lk 2:12]

WELCOMING WHAT IS TO COME

The sign is a naked body... the skin of a newborn, warm, soft, delicate, defenceless, just skin.

A child has been born to us, a son has been given to us; authority rests on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:5-6).

He does not burst in with a bang, but offers himself as a Child lying in a manger. God entrusts himself to our freedom, arms outstretched, waiting to be welcomed (or not) without imposing, without invading... from beginning to end, we encounter a God who is born with open arms and dies with open arms, waiting only to be welcomed. A wonderful combination that already reveals a way of loving... infinite, gratuitous.

To welcome Jesus is to welcome the seed, the small thing that cannot yet defend itself, but is already here... the time of waiting is over. The time has come to make room for God's weakness, to let something profound begin within us. God saves us not from power, but from the fragility that questions, compromises and makes us grow.

Mary and Joseph accepted this from the beginning. They said yes to a God who made them vulnerable, who slipped into their plans, giving new meaning to availability, to the impossible, to goodness and justice, making rejection the most beautiful and subversive form of love and protection... By taking care of the Child, God's strength began to beat in Mary's body and in Joseph's dreams. Salvation began to walk with them.

- *What areas of my life need to open up today to welcome the fragility of God, who comes without imposing himself but who wants to transform my inner self?*
- *In what specific situations am I invited, like Mary and Joseph, to say a "yes" that makes me more vulnerable, more available and more capable of loving with humility and trust?*

"LET US GO TO BETHLEHEM" [Lk 2:15]

WHAT HAPPENS AT NIGHT

The birth of Jesus takes place on a night of contrasts. Already, the mystery that will run through his whole life is taking shape around Jesus: some welcome him, while others do not know how to see him.

'He came to his own, and his own did not receive him' (Jn 1:11).

The God who is born as a Child can be hidden both by night and by excess light: we often seek God in beauty, in security, in what pleases the senses, and we do not perceive what is hidden behind a shadow or does not occupy the foreground; at other times we allow ourselves to be dazzled by flashes that are more spectacle than truth.

On this blessed night, let us contemplate three protagonists, angels, shepherds and magi, liminal beings who inhabit the frontiers of our world:

- The angels, joyful, sing on high, announcing and sending, unable to contain their joy.
- The shepherds watch and wait, allowing themselves to be surprised and rushing to verify the News, recognising, marvelling and proclaiming it.

- The magi reach their destination, having come here in search of answers. They prostrate themselves before the manifestation of God, and now all that remains is to return.

In the middle of the night, in the open air, when only the light of the daily bonfire reaches them, the announcement breaks the routine...

"The heavens proclaim the glory of God, the firmament proclaims the work of his hands: day after day it passes on the message, night after night whispers it." (Psalm 18)

At Christmas, light and darkness come together: a child threatened from his cradle, a world that does not want to lose its power, those touched by the light of the Child can no longer live in the same way. And in the depths of the night, when the world seemed suspended in serene silence, the almighty Word descended without fanfare, without weapons, with no more force than that of a child who cannot even speak.

Where we seek power, fragility bursts in; where we imagine a warrior, a little one appears who only knows how to spread his arms, who silently asks for an answer, a "yes" (which is also an "I love you"), waiting to be recognised by those who keep their eyes open in the night.

- *What shadows or excesses of light in my life prevent me from recognising God when he comes in a humble and silent way, hidden in the small and everyday?*
- *What steps am I called to take to allow myself to be surprised, to set out on the journey and respond with a "yes" that opens space for the vulnerable love that God offers me?*

"THEY FOUND MARY, JOSEPH AND THE CHILD" [Lk 2:16]

THE FAMILY OF GOD

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and she will name him Emmanuel' (Isaiah 7:14).

"A shoot shall spring from the stump of Jesse, and a shoot will spring up from his roots" (Is 11:1).

To contemplate Christmas is to enter into that loving gaze that does not remain on the surface, but penetrates to the depths and discovers the Mystery hidden in each person, in each event, in each fragment of reality.

A special place in this story is occupied by a love between three people: Joseph, Mary and the child. A love that will hurt and that will require a big heart, where much can be kept even without understanding, a love that possesses nothing, anonymous, poor, detached. A silent, poor, fleeting love, full of trust. A love protected by generosity, by dreams, by trust in God's plan.

And if I imagine an exchange of glances between those three, I can only see the transparency of God's love: celebration, fireworks, symphonic music, overflowing joy, true passion... angels singing, shepherds beside themselves, magi giving away their heavy riches, people in awe, cosmic collapse!

The final invitation is to become part of Jesus' family, to bring our own story and relate it to the event in Bethlehem: to let the memory be illuminated, to let the memory of the heart be opened, and to let our world, with its beauty and its wounds, feel embraced by the God with us, who has wanted to share from within all human narrowness.

Contemplate the Mystery, devote time to it: ask for acceptance, humility, gratitude, service and adoration, ask to be transformed by the gentle light of the Child. Because those who contemplate God made Child - goodness offered, hospitality without limits - cannot continue to place themselves in the world in the same way.

Contemplating Christmas moves us to live differently, to relate to others and to God from a truer charismatic identity, an incarnate spirituality, a ver, always from fraternity, with others, prepared and learning, with great care, accompanying, encouraging, supporting, leading. Contemplating Christmas is a love that springs from the manger and spills over into all of life.

- *In this Christmas mosaic, where everything has its place, what place does my own life occupy? From where do I feel that God is speaking to me today?*
- *In the silent love of Joseph and Mary (poor, exiled, trusting), what call do I discover to transform my ways of loving, serving and caring for the fragile life that God places before me?*

CHRISTMAS WORDS

Christmas is a time of joy and life, for a child has been born to us, Jesus, Emmanuel. Christmas is the time of God-with-us, of warmth in our hearts and homes, and even among peoples and nations. It is the time of regained childhood, of adult maturity and of fulfilled promises. It is the time of the mystery incarnate!

Christmas is a time of letters and hugs, of gatherings and families united, of truces and new years. It is a time of peace and joy, of open walls and bright stars; of tears, dispossession and helpless life. It is a seasonal time: it invites us to come together to go out into the streets, squares and markets; to demonstrate, to be epiphany.

Christmas is also our time, everyone's time, without exception, for we are all sons and daughters, and as such we must live it, here and now.

Christmas is to wander around those places where someone was born and began to exist for others. Christmas is to expose ourselves "in the open", like the shepherds, in case the melody of their song reaches us, "Glory to God and peace to the men he loves so much", and let ourselves be carried away by it, humming it in the secret of our hearts. And if we are able, to dance to its rhythm, even if it is madness.

Christmas is drawing closer today to those corners of the world where the Word silently camps, where his suffering humanity takes refuge today, and offering him (offering them) shelter, welcome, ground to dwell and rest on, because they have come to their own, they are in their own, and the joy of receiving them is within our reach today.

Christmas is going to Bethlehem to receive that great joy that is for all the people; it is feeling upon us the power of the Spirit who sends us to bring the Good News to the poor: "A Saviour has been born to us".

Christmas is going to Bethlehem to let ourselves be loved, to listen in silence to the words that the shepherds heard: "Peace to men and women whom the Lord loves"; to feel enveloped in God's complacency; to experience the joy of being liked by him, of being the object of his gratuitous love.

F. Uribarri [Brisa y Rocío. Ed. Verbo Divino]

Song: Palabra Encarnada – Ain Karem