

**Reflection on the Gospel Readings for Christmas Year B
(Luke 2:1-20; John 1:1-18)**

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The readings for the Christmas liturgies vary from celebration to celebration. The gospel for Midnight Mass (Luke 2:1-14) comes from the great story-teller Luke, as does the gospel for the early morning Mass (Luke 2:15-20). Luke tells us that Jesus was born into the world of the Roman Empire during the reign of Caesar Augustus. In his lifetime, Augustus was acclaimed by the people as saviour of the world, son of God, and bringer of peace. Luke's communities at the end of the first century would have known the achievements and ambiguous reputation of Caesar Augustus. These early Christians would have recognised in Luke's story of the birth of Jesus a deliberate attempt to proclaim Jesus, rather than Caesar Augustus, as the face of God, as saviour of the world and as bringer of the good news of peace.

Luke is a master storyteller. He weaves, from Israel's sacred history and from what he knows about Jesus' origins, a wonderful tapestry of life and hope for the world, a tapestry that unites the heavenly, the human, and the animal world in one great act of praise. The violence that brought "peace" to the Roman Empire has no place in this scene. The peace of Christ is the deep peace of non-violence and reconciliation. It is the peace that satisfies the longing of the human heart and establishes right relationship in the whole Earth community.

The gospel for Christmas morning Mass comes from the prologue to John's gospel. It presents Jesus as the Word of God made flesh, as the locus of life, as the light that is coming into the world, as the one through whom truth is revealed and the one who makes God known. The opening words of the gospel, "in the beginning" evoke the opening words of Genesis. The Word that becomes flesh was "with God" even before the spirit of God swept over the chaos and brought all else into being. John's prologue foreshadows the suffering and rejection that Jesus will experience at the hands of "his own". To those who receive him, however, to those who believe in his name, he gives power to become "children of God". John weaves a rich tapestry of wonderful images that will yield their meaning little by little as the gospel story unfolds. As we celebrate Christmas, we might consider the mystery of the Word made flesh who "tents" among us and brings life to the whole Earth community. Australian theologian Denis Edwards put it this way: "God embraces 'flesh' in Jesus of Nazareth, that flesh might be transformed and deified. This flesh...includes each wallaby, dog and dolphin. ... In the Word made flesh, God embraces the whole of life on Earth, with all its evolutionary processes, in an event that is both a radical identification in love and an unbreakable promise." At Christmas, we ponder the enormity of this truth.