



Nativity of the Lord (Vigil)



Date: Tuesday, December 24, 2024 | **Season:** Christmas | **Year:** C

First Reading: Isaiah 62:1–5

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 89:4–5, 16–17, 27, 29 | **Response:** Psalm 89:2a

Second Reading: Acts 13:16–17, 22–25

Gospel Acclamation: O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:1–25

Preached at: the Jesuit Institute in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Tonight, we gather on this sacred night to celebrate the eve of our Savior's birth and to mark the opening of the 2025 Jubilee. This is no ordinary night—it is a night that bridges heaven and earth, light and darkness, promise and fulfillment. We stand at the threshold of a great mystery, eagerly awaiting the birth of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

Our Gospel this evening begins with the genealogy of Jesus. While it may seem like a list of unfamiliar names to us in Johannesburg in 2024, to Jewish listeners two thousand years ago, these names carried deep significance, connecting Jesus to the rich story of Israel and the promises made to our ancestors in faith. As we reflect on this lineage, let us remember that each name represents a part of God's unfolding plan, leading us to this moment of grace and hope. May this Christmas Eve inspire us to embrace the light and hope of Christ in our lives, and to share that light and hope with others as we enter this Jubilee year together.

Central to this genealogy is the word "after." It recalls the exile to Babylon, a time of profound darkness and despair. Yet, as the prophet Isaiah reminds us, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2). And "No more shall people call you 'Forsaken,' ... but you shall be called 'My Delight'" (Isaiah 62:4). God did not abandon His people; there was always an "after."

What does “after” mean for us? As my fellow Jesuit, Fr. David Neuhaus, SJ, reflects, “‘After’ means that God does not allow death to have the final word. He remains faithful to His promises.” The genealogy of Jesus testifies to this faithfulness—a story of hope and restoration, culminating in the birth of Christ, who is the ultimate “after.” In Him, exile becomes homecoming, darkness gives way to light, and doubts are transformed into hope.

For the past four weeks of Advent, we have prepared our hearts for this moment. We have lit candles, dispelling darkness and proclaiming the coming of the true Light. And now, on this holy night, we rejoice in the fulfillment of God’s promise: Immanuel, God with us.

Jesus is not just another name in the lineage of Israel; He is our Savior, the Son of God and Son of Man. His birth transforms history. As Mary lovingly placed Him in a manger—a humble feeding trough—she foreshadowed the gift He would become for us. Jesus, the Bread of Life—born in Bethlehem, the house of bread—offers Himself to us in the Eucharist, sustaining us with His very presence.

I would like to invite everyone present here tonight to join us as we receive Communion this Christmas, remembering that the Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect, but medicine for the weak. As you receive communion this evening, allow the encounter with Christ to fortify your hope and heal you. For tonight, in Rome, the Church begins the Jubilee of 2025 with the opening of the Holy Doors of St. Peter’s Basilica. The Holy Father is inviting us towards hope, firstly in finding hope amidst the signs of the times in which we live, to find God’s presence and action in the world; and especially finding hope in our shared desire for peace in the world. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace who this night is with us.

Furthermore, Pope Francis asks us to find hope in our lives, in the daily living as witnesses to hope to the imprisoned, the sick, and to the young and then old, to the migrants, and the exiles around us. And we can begin this process by encouraging our family and friends. Tonight our hopes become real as we celebrate the birth of the hope of the world. Let us make Pope Francis’ words this evening our own:

“Through our witness, may hope spread to all those who anxiously seek it. May the way we live our lives say to them in so many words: ‘Hope in the Lord! Hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord!’” (Psalm 27:14). May the power of hope fill our days, as we celebrate the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ this Christmas, to whom be praise and glory, now and forever.

Tonight, as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, let us remember that we too are part of this story—we are part of, and have a part to play, in the ‘after’. The genealogy continues with us, as we carry the light and hope of Christ into the world. Like the shepherds who first heard the Good News, let us go forth from this place, with new hope, proclaiming with joy: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests!”

May this Christmas bring renewal to our hearts, as we embrace the hope and light that Christ brings. Amen.

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