

SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH + YORKVILLE

January 7, 2024

Newsletter no. 199

In the days from Christmas to the feast of the Epiphany, this Sunday, much of the material that we read in the Gospel at Mass comes from the first two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew and the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke. The initial chapters of those two Gospels are called the Infancy Narratives, and everything that we know about Jesus' conception, birth and childhood comes from them. Interestingly, the Gospels of Mark and John, which were the first and the last to be written, tell us nothing at all about any of these things. Mark commences almost abruptly with Jesus' baptism, which occurred when he was an adult and immediately preceded his public ministry, whereas John, after a lengthy prologue, begins the story of Jesus soon after his baptism.

Matthew's Infancy Narrative begins with a list of Jesus' ancestors on the male side, starting with Abraham and ending with Joseph, despite the fact that, since Mary was a virgin, Jesus' male ancestors would have come from her side and not Joseph's. Then the conception and birth of Jesus are related almost in passing, without any of the fanfare that we see in Luke. What follows are the accounts of the visit of the magi from the East, the slaughter of the innocents that King Herod ordered, the Holy Family's flight to Egypt, and finally their return to Nazareth.

Luke's Infancy Narrative, on the other hand, is longer and much more detailed, and it includes the miraculous conception and birth of John the Baptist as a kind of counterpoint to Jesus' still more miraculous conception and birth. Luke tells the story of the infant Jesus in the manger, the angel's appearance to the shepherds, the apparition of a multitude of angels singing "Glory to God in the highest," the visit of the shepherds to the manger, the circumcision of Jesus and his presentation in the Temple in Jerusalem, accompanied by the prophecies of Simeon and Anna. Luke concludes his Infancy Narrative with the account of Mary and Joseph's discovery of the twelve-year-old Jesus with the teachers in the Temple.

As we can see, apart from Jesus' conception and birth (which, however, Matthew and Luke relate in two very dissimilar ways), the two Infancy Narratives have nothing in common. How can their differences be explained? Why would one evangelist include something important that the other doesn't? Why, for example, doesn't Luke say anything about the visit of the magi? Or why doesn't Matthew tell us about the angels and the shepherds? We may never have reflected on these differences because we tend to view the Christmas story as a single whole, not distinguishing between what comes from Matthew and what comes from Luke. As in St. Joseph's Christmas pageant at the 5:00 Mass on Christmas Eve, the shepherds and the angels and the magi were all perfectly at home together!

And there are some other major questions: Is everything that Matthew and Luke tell us historically true, or is at least some of it entirely symbolic rather than historical? If so, which is which? And, as for what is historically true, where did Matthew and Luke get their information from, since they couldn't have witnessed the events themselves? It used to be said that Mary, Jesus' mother, gave Luke the details of her son's conception, birth and childhood, but most scholars today would not accept that as a possibility.

For those who are interested in getting an in-depth understanding of the Infancy Narratives, Raymond Brown's lengthy study, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (1999), is the definitive work on the subject; it isn't for the faint of heart, however. But a much shorter work on the same topic, also by Raymond Brown and entitled *An Adult Christ at Christmas* (1978), is available as well and very approachable.

The Christmas Season ends on Monday, January 8th, with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The Christmas decorations are scheduled to come down on Tuesday the 9th at 6:00 pm. Volunteers are requested to help with removing them. Many thanks if you can be there!

Father Boniface

Mass intentions for the period from January 6th to 14th

Saturday-Sunday, January 6th-7th (Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord)

4:00 pm: Jimmy Quinn (D)
8:00 am: Megan, Matt, Sarah and Ryan (L)
10:00 am (German): St. Joseph's Parishioners
12:00 noon: Mary and Vincent Cavallo (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Franciska Harangozo (D)
6:00 pm: Sheila Murray (L)

Monday, January 8th (Feast of the Baptism of the Lord)

7:00 am: Maria Lavin (L)
12:15 pm: Anthony Sclafani (D)

Tuesday, January 9th

7:00 am: Mimi Lawless (D)
12:15 pm: Juan Carlos Polimeni (L)

Wednesday, January 10th

7:00 am: Daniel J. Moloney (D), First Anniversary
12:15 pm: Pacita Batac (D)

Thursday, January 11th

7:00 am: Vincent Polimeni (L)
12:15 pm: Mary Moynihan (D)

Friday, January 12th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Judy Gordley (D)

Saturday, January 13th

8:00 am:
12:15 pm: Mathai V. Thomas (D)
4:00 pm: Ignaz Martin (D)

Sunday, January 14th

8:00 am: St. Joseph's Parishioners
10:00 am: Fundador Santiago (D)
12:00 noon: Maryanne Meyer (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Franciska Harangozo (D)
6:00 pm: Kyong "Kay" Won Dorcheus (D)