

HOMILETICS

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By

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SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (December 7, 1980)

As we saw last Sunday, starting with the Second Sunday in Advent our thoughts are more directed to the first coming of Christ at Christmas, though the second coming at the Parousia comes forth now and then. Today especially *Isaiah* and *John the Baptist* are preaching: Prepare the way of the Lord (gospel)! The Spirit is upon him (first reading). In him all the promises are fulfilled (second reading).

First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

We saw last Sunday that the first part of *Isaiah* (Is. 1-12) contains prophecies against Judah-Jerusalem: In chapters 1-6 these prophecies go back to the time prior to the Syro-Ephraemite War (735 B.C.). In chapters 7-12 the prophecies stem from the time of king Ahaz (735-715 B.C.) and are mainly connected with the clash of opinions between *Isaiah* (and thus lastly God himself) and Ahaz. Since most of these prophecies are Messianic and contain the finest parts of *Isaiah*, Is. 7-12 is called *The Book of the Emmanuel*. Four prophecies of the Emmanuel are outstanding:

- (1) He is the son of a maiden (virgin) (Is. 7:14), the true God with us.
- (2) He is the light in the darkness (Is. 9:1).
- (3) He is (a) wonder-counsellor, (b) mighty God, (c) Father forever, (d) prince of peace (Is. 9:6).
- (4) He is full of the Holy Spirit (Is. 11:2).

The first reading of today unfolds that fourth prophecy. Prepare the way of the Lord, the gospel tells us. The first reading pictures this Lord we are waiting for:

1. That Messiah is a shoot of the stem of Jesse (Is. 11:1)

"A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom."

This is a typical Hebrew synonymous parallelism where the thought is expressed twice, but in the second line with different synonyms. Thus stump is the same as roots, shoot the same as bud, sprout the same as blossom. The kingdom of Judah would be destroyed, but there would be a remnant, called *shear* in Is. 14:22 as one of his sons got that symbolic name, here however called *hoter* (shoot) and in the parallel line of Is. 11:1 *neser* (bud). And from that stump or root would sprout a shoot or from these roots would blossom a bud. As David was born from Jesse, Christ, the true David, would descend from Jesse. A new shoot means *hope*.

Mt. 2:13 finds in the similarity of sound between *neser* (root) and Nazareth enough reason to see here in Is. 11:1 a prophecy that Jesus hails from Nazareth: "He settled in a town called Nazareth. In this way what was said through the prophets was fulfilled: 'He shall be called a Nazarean!'"

The Fathers of the Church develop this simile further: the shoot is our Blessed Lady (*virga - virgo*) and the bud (*flos*) our Lord. This text and the explanation of the Fathers has inspired our old Christmas song: "A rose sprang up unheeded, a fresh and tender shoot; As prophets long had pleaded, the rose from Jesse's root."

2. *The Spirit of Yahweh is upon the Messiah* 11:2

As the Spirit of the Lord came upon the leaders of Israel (Gideon [Jgs. 6:34], Saul [1 Sam. 11:6]) and enabled them to perform their extraordinary task, so the Spirit of the Lord will come upon the Messiah, not only for a short while and in passing, but for good. And he will come with his fullness. Six gifts are mentioned, always in pairs: 1. wisdom and 2. understanding form the intellectual outfit.

The Messiah is teacher;

3. counsel and 4. strength belong to the practical outfit. The Messiah is pastor and guide of his people;

5. knowledge and 6. fear of the Lord mark the religious outfit. The Messiah is priest.

The Latin translation, the Vulgate wrongly translates the last gift "fear of the Lord" with "piety" and thus reaches seven gifts, since Is. 11:3 continues in Hebrew (correctly) and in Latin: "And his delight shall be the fear of the Lord". Others, in order to reach the traditional seven gifts would consider "the Spirit of the Lord" in Is. 11:2 as the stem and thus the first gift, from which the six pairs in the rest of Is. 11:2 branch off.

3. *The reign of the prince of peace* 11:6-9

The peace of the Messiah is depicted in an idyllic way as it seems to be unhistorically presupposed also in paradise (Gen. 1:29-30). Carnivorous animals never were nor ever will be herbivorous. But the author wants to say: The animals who were created for men's use and benefit became their enemies in consequence of sin, but will return to their allegiance in the Messianic kingdom. There will be peace and that peace will be reflected in animals also (cf. Rom. 8:19ff).

4. *The subjects of the Messiah: Gentiles and Jews returned from exile* 11:10-16

After the exile the Jews will return from the different countries where they were dispersed: and also the Gentiles will come to the shoot of Jesse, the Messiah.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 3:1-12

Before Jesus Christ started his career as Messiah, preaching the good news to the poor, John the Baptist prepared his way. He announces the coming (Advent) of Christ. Thus the Jews shall prepare for his arrival, they shall repent. The Baptist does not prepare for Christ's coming at Christmas, but for his public appearance in Judea and Galilee. We see, we have to take the name "Advent" in a larger sense.

This pericope all three Synoptics have in common and each one makes it his own, adding the typical Markan, Matthean and Lucan features. For Matthew that means especially (1) the remark that the desert was in Judea (Mat. 3:1) for Matthew writes for Jews who know their country, (2) the remark that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2), a typical Jewish expression, (3) the sharp attack on the leaders

of Israel (break with Judaism in Mt.): Mt. 3:7 and (4) the eschatological urgency that the decision has to be made now (Mt. 3:10). The rest (John's preaching on penance and the description of the Baptist) he has in common with Mark.

In those days (an undetermined expression of time) came John the Baptist as preacher in the desert of Judea. A prophetic voice (Mt. 3:3) is heard for the first time since some four hundred years. One can imagine the excitement of the people. In the desert one can clearly hear the voice of God. The Baptist is only a voice, he only preaches what God tells him to preach, not his own wisdom. "Reform your lives! This *metanoieite* is not just an external penance, some hardships and sacrifices one bears and makes, but a complete change of one's life, an about face. So far we ourselves stood in the center of our life, now God has to become the center. After all, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2). In order not to take the name of the Lord in vain, Matthew instead of saying "kingdom of God" says "kingdom of heaven"; on the other side, this expression allows him to put Father and Son on the same level: not only the rule of the Father is at hand but also the rule of the Son. In Christ's person the kingdom of heaven is at hand, is here. And that's as Mk. puts it: the beginning of the good news (Mk. 1:1).

No wonder then that the Baptist can only say, borrowing the words of Isaiah 40:3: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." Whenever in the Orient a king came to a country, a road had to be made. Now the king of kings is coming.

Mt. 3:4 briefly describes the clothing and the food of the Baptist. He wears a special garb as prophets of the OT often did: a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt (cf.: Elijah in 2 Kgs. 1:8). He eats what one can find in the desert: grasshoppers, these could be roasted and seasoned with butter and honey.

The preaching on penance is climaxed by a baptism, underlining the confession of sins and being the outward sign of the sorrow for sins, not a sacrament taking away the sins. After all, the Baptist baptizes only with water which cannot effect a real cleaning of the heart. This cleaning of the heart the Messiah will do, baptizing with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mt. 3:11). Fire cleanses the good people but burns the bad ones. Thus the preaching of the Messiah is judgment. This judgment (separating good from bad people) is again expressed with the picture of the winnowing-fan (Mt. 3:12): Good people

are like grain that falls straight down when it is thrown against the wind; the chaff, however is blown further away by the wind and will be burnt.

Many people come to hear the Baptist. Also Pharisees and Sadducees come; i.e., the leaders of the Jews. Against them the Baptist becomes unusually severe. A prophet has to tell the truth; and as such a prophet, telling Herod and Herodias the truth, he would later on die (Mt. 14:1-12). They are comparable to vipers whose venom is unexpected and imperceptible in such a subtle way they seduce people, especially by their bad example. The Pharisees are smug, thinking that their bodily descendancy from Abraham would save them. It is high-time to do penance. The axe is already laid at the root and will cut down the tree any moment. Now is the time for conversion.

HOMILY

THE LORD IS COMING — PREPARE THE WAY!

1. The good news of Advent is: The Lord is coming. Israel had been in captivity of Babylonia and Assyria; had returned, it is true, but it had never gained real independence any more. There was no king, no prophet, no national leader as in former days. The tree was cut off. But then of that stump would come a *new shoot*, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, or if we want to follow the unfolding of the picture by many Fathers of the Church: From the root of the cut off tree would sprout a shoot, our Blessed Lady, and from this shoot would blossom a bud, Jesus Christ. In a subdued cord one hears already Christmas: A rose sprang up unheeded, a fresh and tender shoot. As prophets long had pleaded; the rose from Jesse's root."

Wherever Christ is, there is *hope*. And to be a Christian means to be a man of hope. No situation can be so desperate for a Christian that there could not be found a solution; Christianity was a new beginning in the fulness of time. And to be a Christian means to be able to make a new beginning. Advent is such a new beginning.

During World War II after the defeat of France, England was left completely alone. It had suffered hard blows and its

cities were badly bombed out. Prime Minister Churchill described the situation before the parliament in its darkest colors. There was silence when he had finished, and on the faces of many there was written despair. Many wanted to give up the struggle of war. But Mr. Churchill continued: "Gentlemen, I find it rather inspiring." And Churchill's hope carried England through.

Lastly hope is something really Christian. No man is hopeless so long as there is the grace of Jesus Christ. "From first to last, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present" (Juergen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 16).

2. The Lord, the Messiah, we are looking forward to is described in Isaiah. He is *full of the Holy Spirit*. As a *teacher* the gifts of wisdom and understanding will help him to preach the good news true and undefiled. In practical situations he will direct people as *pastor* endowed with the gifts of counsel and strength. The Spirit will help him understand the signs of time and find a way out in hopeless situations. As *priest* the Messiah will be directed by the gifts of knowledge and fear of the Lord. A priest directs all things to God, mere human things are used for the honor of God. And there "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Job 28:28).

Any Christian will be a man of the Holy Spirit, directed by him. Any conversion, as we will see, cannot be reached with one's own power and effort, but through the Holy Spirit.

3. The Lord, full of the Holy Spirit, is coming. The conclusion can only be: "*Prepare his way!*" John the Baptist does not grow tired telling his hearers to make straight his paths, words which he takes from Isaiah 40:3. Any state's visit of an Oriental king had to be prepared. Since highways were scarce (only the Romans started systematically to build lasting highways and have become famous for that), often enough a way had to be made for the first time for such a visiting king. How much work that is, everybody knows who has been employed for such constructions.

God prepared Christ's coming by his messenger John the Baptist and still sends such messengers to prepare his way. John demonstrates what such messengers shall look like:

a. A messenger is the *voice* of his master. He has no own message, but the message of his master. His sermons are as

good as the content of them is Christ. He does not speak about his own experience so much, or if he does, only as illustration of Christ's word. He preaches the good news, Christ.

b. He *tells the truth* and does not flatter. Gospel means good news, but only for those who want to follow it. For others the first part of the good news consists in hearing the unpleasant truth in the hope that it will make them free (cf. Jn. 8:32). It is the greatest service of a messenger for mankind in preparing the way to Christ to tell the truth in the midst of confusion of opinions and even errors, if people like to hear it or not. Often enough only later on we see that an unpleasant truth was the only right thing to say after all. The Baptist did not try to please people, not even king Herod or Herodias. Only strong characters have told unpleasant truths and will do so. A person who tries to please everybody pleases nobody. Paul hands it over as testament to his favorite disciple Timothy: "I charge you to preach the word, to stay with this task whether convenient or inconvenient, correcting, reproving, appealing, constantly teaching and never losing patience" (2 Tim. 4:2).

4. For *us personally* our preparation for the coming of Christ means *conversion*. *Metanoein* in Greek does not mean a chain of external exercises of penance. They may prove helpful. But *metanoein* is more; it means to turn in our thinking, to make an about face. So far our own plans and interest have been in the center of our life and activity, as it was true with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Now Christ shall be the center. "Reform your lives because the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2) tells us. Kingdom of heaven stands here for kingdom of God and Kingdom of Christ, both are one. This is the first good news: in the person of Christ the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God is at hand as the parallel report of today's gospel in Mk. 1:1 makes clear: "Here begins the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And then comes the report of the preaching of the Baptist as we have it in the gospel of today.

5. What counts is therefore our nearness to Christ. There are no titles, no degrees, no membership certificates that help us, but only our relationship with Christ. The Sadducees and Pharisees thought the fact that they were bodily sons of Abraham would be enough guarantee to secure them a place in the kingdom of heaven. But since their lives did not correspond with their bodily descent from Abraham, the Baptist could only tell them: "You brood of vipers! Who told you to flee from the wrath to come. Bear fruit that benefits repentance" (Mt.

3:7-8). Vipers were often fleeing to safety from a fire in the field or desert. That luck the Pharisees would not have with Christ who is fire that illuminates and warms those of good will, but burns those who resist him. The only way to safety would be and is for all of us: To turn in our thinking and place Christ in the center of our life.

6. This conversion is not so much the result of our own efforts, though we must apply ourselves as much as we can. The Baptist significantly says: "*Bear fruit that befits repentance*" (Mt. 3:8). He does not say "produce, do *works* of penance." God produces fruits, as God alone can make a tree grow, we can only plant it.

As Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, by the power of the Most High (Lk. 1:35), as the shoot was springing up from the stump since the Spirit of the Lord rested upon him; so we will be able to bear fruits of conversion only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (December 14, 1980)

The liturgy of today speaks about the Messiah in our midst. He is coming to save us, with mighty signs (Isaiah 35:1-6a,10). He fulfills all the prophecies and especially heals, but blessed is he who takes no offense at him (Mt. 11:2-11). Above all, we must have patience and be able to wait (James 5:7-10). One could sum up all the ideas, saying: Be not scandalized by the God in your midst!

First Reading: Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

In the Book of Isaiah (Is. 1-39) there are some parts written not by Isaiah but by later unknown authors. Such a part is Is. 34-35, the so-called Small Apocalypse. These two chapters are in some ways similar to Deutero Isaiah (Is. 40-55) and are written after the exile (after 536 B.C.). As in most apocalypses a judgment is described followed by a new era, so in Is. 34 an unknown author announces the judgment of God upon Edom to picture in Is. 35 the deliverance of Israel. Israel will be delivered by the Messiah.

The deliberation of the Jews was the Exodus from Egypt to the promised land under Moses. Any other liberation could

be only a new, a second Exodus. Thus Is. 35 describes this deliverance of Israel (from the captivity of Babylon) in terms of a new Exodus surpassing the first Exodus: (1) The wilderness will be abundant with flowers and trees and all kinds of vegetation as one can find it only on the proverbially well-forested Lebanon in the North of Palestine (cf. Ps. 72:16; Is. 60:13; 29:17) and on the richly wooded Mount Carmel with its southern slopes running down to the plain of Sharon which was also once thickly forested (cf. Is. 29:17; 32:15). And since there will be plenty of water (not mentioned in the reading) (Is. 35:7) everything can grow. A highway will be there (Is. 35:8; omitted in today's reading), which will be safe from animals (Is. 35:9). (2) On it those the Lord has ransomed will return (Is. 35-10) and enter Zion singing, there seeing the glory of the Lord, the Messiah (Is. 35:2). People have reason for confidence, since the battle is won (Is. 35:3). The Lord has vindicated them (35:4). As savior he heals all the infirmities of the body (Is. 35:5-6): The blind can see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dumb speak and sing. Especially these last two verses are often quoted by Jesus; so in today's gospel (Mt. 11:5).

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 11:2-11

John the Baptist had fearlessly preached the Word of God and had been put in jail because he had dared telling king Herod that he must not live with his brother's wife. The gospel of today tells us about (1) a delegation sent by the Baptist in prison to ask Christ who He is (Mt. 11:2-6) and (2) Christ's answer about Himself and about the Baptist (Mt. 11:7-15). The last four verses are omitted in today's gospel. Both parts are taken from Q (*Quelle*), the source of sayings of Christ, common to Matthew and Luke.

(1) John had preached about the one more powerful than himself, coming after him, who would baptize in Holy Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:11) who would clear the threshing floor and gather the grain but burn the chaff in unquenchable fire (Mt. 3:12). Was Jesus really this more powerful person John had preached about or did Christ's mild behavior, being a friend of sinners not come up to the Baptist's expectations? In other words: was John scandalized because he had expected the Lord to be stronger, more powerful in condemning the bad people as the Baptist had done and now being in jail for it? Some

will answer the question with a "yes". Even saints can get weak and have doubts; this is not the opposite of having faith yet as long as we do something to overcome them.

Others (and probably most) however will say John sent the delegation not for himself but for his disciples. His device had been: Christ must increase and I must decrease (Jn. 3:30). Now he was close to be spent as holocaust and his last wish could only be that his disciples would find the way to the groom (Jn. 3:29). Thus the Lord should reveal himself to them.

Christ answers only indirectly, not with a clear "yes". His answer is mainly taken from Is. 35:5-6, and from Is. 29:18-19 and 61:1. He, the Lord, fulfills the prophecies of the prophets and his hearers shall judge for themselves if he is the one who is to come, the one foretold by the prophets and thus also foretold by the Baptist: The blind will see, the lame will walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf will hear, the dead will be raised to life, the poor will have the good news preached to them. These are the miracles Christ performs. But as always, miracles are no proof for Christ's divinity, they are only *signs*, leading a man to faith in Christ, if that man is of good will, if he is willing to hear (Mt. 11:15). There is however, the possibility that somebody will not find these signs convincing enough, because they are different from what a person had expected. "Happy the man who finds no stumbling block in me" (Mt. 11:6) Christ can only say.

(2) After the messengers of the Baptist have left Christ gives witness to the Baptist. (a) He is not a vascillating person, carried away by every wind of opinion. After all, he denounced Herod's marriage with his brother's wife. (b) He is not a man clothed in soft raiment. Rather, he wears a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt (Mt. 3:4; cf. 2 Kgs. 1:8; Zech. 13:4). (c) He is a prophet with a message of God. For the first time since the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi a prophet's voice is heard again. (d) Yes, he is even the special messenger sent ahead of the Messiah to prepare his way, of whom Malachi 3:1 speaks. He prepares the way for the kingdom of heaven which is here with the person of Christ. Thus John is the greatest of all men. But since he only prepares the way to the kingdom but does not belong to the kingdom any more (he belongs to the Old Testament and not the New Testament), every smallest person of the New Testament is greater than the greatest of the Old Testament, not because of personal reasons but because of the light of the gospel John

did not have but anybody in the New Testament has. John is even the returned Elijah (Mt. 11:14). And thus the kingdom of heaven is coming with might. But one has to have ears to hear it and to believe it (11:15). Only those who use force, make special efforts, will enter (11:12).

HOMILY

REJOICE, DO NOT BE SCANDALIZED BY CHRIST IN YOUR MIDST!

1. The good news of mid-Advent is: "The Lord is near. He will come soon. Yes, he is even in your midst. Thus rejoice!" The prophet picture him already as present. For a prophet the future is so vivid as for a child the imagination is so that he does not distinguish between present and future as a child does not distinguish between imagination and reality.

For us Christ is really here already, we do not have to wait for him till Christmas. It is not so much that he would come for the first time; rather, he comes with special graces at Christmas, he comes closer to us since we prepare ourselves to be more open to him. So we pray, "Come", although he is already here. It's almost the same as if a mother has her child on her arms and says, "Come", to give him a big hug and kiss him.

2. Isaiah pictures the deliverance of Israel as result of the coming of the Messiah. The Jews will be freed from exile. The result of this deliverance will be two-fold: (1) The desert will start blooming with abundant flowers. It will become as fertile as the proverbially fertile parts of the country: the Lebanon, Mt. Carmel and its southern plain of Sharon. Since there is plenty of water, everything can grow. To connect the different parts of the country there will be a beautiful highway, which is safe from all wild animals. And on it those whom the Lord has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing (Is. 35:1-4.7-10). (2) The Messiah will be a savior who heals all the infirmities of the body: the blind can see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dumb speak and sing (Is. 35:5-6).

Prophecies are a definite literary form, and so are the descriptions of miracles. The Messiah has come and whoever had the chance to see the Holy Land has seen that we still can

look for the abundant vegetation Isaiah describes. Most of the country today, almost two thousand years after the Messiah is not very attractive vegetation-wise. And concerning the sick people: There are certainly more hospitals there today than at the time of Christ, but the number of the sick has hardly decreased, probably even increased, since more people can afford going to a hospital and have more time to take out for being sick than at the time of Jesus.

3. It's obvious then that Isaiah with his pictures speaks about the wonderful change that will take place in the spiritual realm. To be without the savior is like living in a desert, to live with him means living in a beautifully fertile country. All the spiritual diseases will disappear: People will see the realities of our faith which natural eyes cannot see. Men will hear God speaking to us in his many ways: in Scripture, in our heart in Holy Eucharist, in the daily events. We can even do what we are supposed to do and recognize as God's wish, we can walk. And we can speak and proclaim God's deeds to us, we can sing God's mercies which he shows to us. The question is only: How much is all this seen by the average observer? How much has the world picture changed by this externally? Do these "miracles" make any headlines, are they reported in the newspapers, are they broadcasted? Probably not. And thus we are scandalized because we had expected greater results.

4. The scandal of the Incarnation is one of the greatest stumbling blocks so that Jesus could say: 'Blest is the man who finds no stumbling block in me' (Mt. 11:6). We will probably not be able to determine if the Baptist was scandalized by the appearance of Christ. It could have been that he expected Jesus to be more foreright and outspoken as he himself was, condemning the adulterous behavior of Herod. Did Jesus not go too much with sinners and bad women instead of separating the chaff from the wheat (Mt. 3:12) as John had foretold it. — But it is more likely that the Baptist wanted to avert the scandal-taking from his disciples. He had clearly prepared the way for Jesus, pointing out that John had to decrease and Christ to increase. The Baptist was only the friend of the groom to whom John was leading the bride. And now that more and more people went to the Lord what greater joy could John have. He was even less than a slave, not worthy to untie the sandals of Jesus, which was considered the meanest duty of a slave. When a priest in the temple started his holy service, a temple slave would untie his sandals so that he could enter the sanctuary barefooted. According to Jewish tradition, the temple

slave belonged to the class of people whose uncleanness could not even be removed at the last day. And now where John was about being martyred, he could have only one wish, i.e., that his disciples would find the way to Christ.

5. Christ singles out that he has fulfilled all the prophecies of the prophets. He applies to himself Is. 35:5-6, Is. 29:18-19; 61:1. But all the works and miracles of Christ are not mathematical proofs for his divinity, but only *signs*; signs which lead somebody to faith in Christ only if the person concerned is open, is willing to be lead by the signs. There is always the possibility that we expect stronger signs, different signs. We can have our picture and model and ideal of Christ, prefabricated in our mind to which the Lord has to come up to. And if he does not come up to our demands we refuse to believe in him. But it should be the other way around: we must find out what Christ is and wants to be and then believe in him.

6. We should rejoice that the Lord is close, that the Lord is with us, among us ever since his Incarnation. But there is always the possibility of being scandalized by his closeness because he is different from the picture we preconceived of him. Most of the relatives of the Lord did not accept him (Jn. 7:5 "Not even his brothers (relatives) believed in him"). If he wanted to be somebody he should not stay so much in Galilee but go to the capital. Only there could he perhaps have some chance of being recognized as Messiah according to their opinion (Jn. 7:4). — And his townmen did not believe in Jesus either. He was just too close to them, too much a part of them, too much known to them, so they thought. They realized that Jesus preached differently from others and with a special wisdom. But the just could not admit it and excused themselves saying: "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't Mary known to be his mother?" (Mt. 13:55). And they knew his brothers and sisters (i.e., according to Hebrew way of expression, his cousins). They found him altogether too much for them (Mt. 13:57), i.e., they were scandalized and did not believe in him (Mt. 13:58). Jesus could only reply: "No prophet is without honor except in his native place" (Mt. 13:57).

7. What do we expect of Christ, what do we expect of the Church, the continuation of Christ incarnate, what do we expect of Christ's messengers? How many founders of religious congregations, how many saints had not been recognized and appreciated during their life, but only after their death did they receive recognition and appreciation. They were just too

human and just too ordinary for many. And yet happy are those who are not scandalized, who do not have prefabricated ideals which they apply to others, measuring them by their own standards instead of listening to God speaking in his messengers. We shall rejoice over Christ living in our midst in his many ways of presence without losing sight of his divinity by his human appearance.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

(December 21, 1980)

Christmas is coming close. Today's liturgy speaks about the mystery of the Incarnation and its annunciation to Joseph: A virgin shall conceive (first reading and gospel) the Son of God, Jesus Christ (gospel), the Immanuel (first reading), who is David's son (second reading).

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14

It was during the Syro-Ephraemite War ca. 735 B.C. The kings of Israel, Pekah and of Aram-Syria, Rezin had made a union and were fighting Judah, where Ahaz was king. Ahaz had in mind to ask the superpower Assyria for help, where Tiglath-pileser III (745-27 B.C.) was ruling. This very moment God sent his prophet Isaiah to Ahaz, telling him not to fear and not to ally himself with any human power, but to trust in God only. Details are described in 2 Kgs. 16:5-9.

God tells Ahaz through Isaiah that everything will turn out successfully. Ahaz only has to believe. Isaiah even offers a sign that this promise will come through. But Ahaz piously refuses such a sign, obviously because he does not quite believe. Thus the prophet gives the sign just the same: "A young woman (*'almah*) shall conceive and bear a son and shall name him Immanuel" (Is. 7:14)". This prophecy we have to see on two levels. In the original historical setting *'almah* is a young woman of marriagable age, presumably a virgin, but the term as such does not say it. For "virgin" Hebrew has the technical term "*bethulah*". The young woman in question is probably the wife of king Ahaz, Abia, and the son to be born is Hezekiah, who would be a good and religious king in opposition to his areligious father Ahaz. In his person in a true sense

God was with his people again. Thus Hezekiah could be called Immanuel. And yet, if we study all the passages in Isaiah about this Immanuel (Is. 9:5-6; 11:1-5) then Hezekiah hardly comes up to this picture. But it is true that Abia and her son Hezekiah were a clear sign by which Ahaz could verify during his life time God's unwavering help and that everything would turn out successfully.

At the second level this prophecy and sign is taken up by the Evangelist Matthew and is applied to the birth of Jesus. Since the Lucan infancy narrative also echoes it (see Lk. 1:31), this application represents a tradition earlier than the two evangelists. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) which is used by the evangelists "young woman" is rendered with *parthenos* (virgin). Isaiah 7:14 originally was thinking only of the immediate political situation and of the certainty that God would intervene in favor of Judah. This assurance was attached to the idea of the continuance of the Davidic line (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14-16) and thus Isaiah expressed a hope that continued in Israel. This hope for the Christian church found its final fulfillment in the birth of Christ from the virgin Mary. He is the true Immanuel, God with us.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 1:18-24

In the New Testament the supernatural conception of Jesus is told only in the two infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. Different as they are, they agree in the essential points that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and that his mother remained a virgin. For us Catholics the virgin birth is a historical fact, not only a theological statement. And for us Mary (and Joseph) remained a virgin all their life, not only till the birth of Jesus. Protestants would admit that the parents of Jesus remained virgins till the birth of the Lord, but had other children afterwards. For us Catholics the brothers and sisters of Christ, mentioned in Mt. 13:55 are cousins of Jesus.

The tradition is much older than Matthew or Luke. These stories are an affirmation of faith in the transcendental origin of Jesus' history. He is not the product of human evolution, the highest achievement of humanity, but the intervention of the transcendent God in human history from outside.

Joseph and Mary were engaged. That was for a Jew almost the same as being married with the exception that they could not have sexual relations yet. Thus they were not living in the same house yet. But to dissolve that engagement could be done only by a divorce bill as in marriage. After a year of engagement the husband would take the bride home which would signify the solemn act of marriage.

During this time of engagement the Incarnation took place which is narrated only in Luke 1:26-38. According to Luke 1:39-80 Mary right after the Incarnation went to her kinswoman Elizabeth to help her during the last three months before the birth of John the Baptist. Then Mary returned. Then "she was found with child through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 1:18). An unusual sentence and formulation. Who found out that Mary was with child? Traditional explanation says, it was Joseph. The addition "through the power of the Holy Spirit" is added by Matthew for the reader. Joseph was told about the conception by the Holy Spirit only by the angel. When Joseph sees that Mary is with child, his dilemma and anxieties start. How shall he explain this? The Incarnation is one of the greatest mysteries which nobody can understand without being instructed by God. All that Joseph knows is Mary has been most faithful, but there is a child which is not his. "Joseph desired (*eboulêthê*) to have the marriage contract set aside quietly; "would not man to have the marriage contract set aside quietly". He is struggling and just did not know what to think or to judge. He tries hard not to make an uncharitable (to Mary) or unjust judgment (about Jesus), assuming that Jesus was conceived in adultery. He wants to be fair and just. Just to the law (Deut. 22:20-21) which requires the stoning of a bride who has been found not to be a virgin and fair to Mary since he does not want to crush her under the weight of an odious public trial. He wants to give the freedom, which could be done only by a contract, signed by witnesses. In this regard engaged couples were for the Jews on the same level as married couples.

At this moment the angel intervenes to prevent a catastrophe. He informs Joseph about the supernatural origin of the child's conception and gives Joseph the mission to incorporate Jesus into the people of Israel and give him the name Jesus, savior. As Mary was enlightened about the Incarnation by an angel, Joseph was.

To this explanation others observe: Joseph at that time could not yet find out that Mary was with child. It was only

after three months after the conception. Furthermore, Joseph could not live together yet with Mary. He could not have heard it from people of Nazareth. Engaged couples could not have sexual relations, this would have been unheard of for Jews, and if the people of Nazareth ever would have found out that Jesus was conceived during the time his parents were only engaged, they would have called Jesus illegitimate, since they blamed him whenever they could. As it turned out Joseph and Mary married at a time one could not yet see that Mary was with child. Then they went to Bethlehem, as married couple. Nobody in Bethlehem knew when they had married. And when the parents of Jesus returned to Nazareth, it was many months later so that nobody could find out when he was conceived.

Did Mary tell Joseph the mystery of the incarnation? The engaged couple could never be alone together. Mary could not easily convince Joseph in such a personal matter. Perhaps Anne, the mother of Mary told Joseph. Mary had told the secret to her mother before she went to Elizabeth telling her the sign for the Incarnation: the late conception of John the Baptist by Elizabeth. Now when Mary returned and the sign had been found true Anne could also tell Joseph about the mystery of the Incarnation. Thus Mary "was found with child through the Holy Spirit."

The moment Joseph learns about the Incarnation by the Holy Spirit he thinks he has no right over the coming child since he is not his father. Thus he wants to give Mary freedom without a public trial. God apparently has not entrusted him with a mission for Mary and her child. But just at this point the angel tells him: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. You know well that the one begotten in her is the work of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you will give him the name Jesus." Upon the angel's word Joseph sees his function to give the child the name Jesus and to adopt the son and thus take him into the lineage of David. This is Joseph's uprightness.

HOMILY

JOSEPH THE GUIDE TO THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

1. In a few days, we are going to celebrate Christmas. We have been prepared by Isaiah and by John the Baptist. Today St. Joseph will help us with our final preparation. Christmas

is celebrating the greatest event in history, the birth of the God-man, Jesus Christ. But this event started with the Incarnation.

2. God could not become man unless a human person, Our Blessed Lady, would consent to the Incarnation. But her first reaction is perplexity, fear which the angel calms down: "Do not fear, Mary. You have found favor with God. You shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus. Great will be his dignity and he will be called Son of the Most High" (Lk. 1:31-32). But Mary can be only the more puzzled: "How can this be since I do not know man" (Lk. 1:34)? The angel answers her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk. 1:35), or as the angel explains the mystery to Joseph in Mt. 1:20: "It is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child." Jesus, the God-man is not the product of human evolution, the highest achievement of humanity, but the intervention of the transcendent God in human history. Only God, God the Holy Spirit, could bring about this greatest mystery and miracle of history of mankind: God made flesh, God made man.

3. Mary's answer to the mystery of the Incarnation can only be a complete "yes", a *fiat* to God's will, a complete surrender: "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say" (Lk. 1:38). And that means for her in concrete: virginity and celibacy as we learn from Mt. 1:25 from the part of Joseph: "He had no relations with her at any time before she bore a son." For Matthew it was only important to stress that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit and that Joseph (as well as Mary) obeyed God completely and thus lived a life of virginity till the birth of Jesus. This does not mean that they had sexual relation afterwards for which we have no text in the New Testament. To be honest, there is the difficulty, how to explain the word of Mt. 13:55: "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't Mary known to be his mother and James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas his brother? Aren't his sisters our neighbors?" Apocryphal Books (like the Story of St. Joseph the Carpenter and the Proto-evangelium of James explain these brothers and sisters of Jesus as coming from a first marriage of Joseph before he married Mary. Protestants take them as real brothers and sisters of Jesus coming from Joseph and Mary. We Catholics take the name "brother" and "sister" as meaning "cousin", since in Hebrew a word for cousin is missing.

And even if we would say as some theologians do that Christ would be God-man, had he been born of Mary and Joseph, Matthew and Luke want to tell us that the virgin birth is not only a theological statement for the divinity of Christ but a historical fact. Man's answer to the incarnation is virginity, celibacy, complete openness to God and total dedication.

4. Celibacy is virginity for Christ's sake. And thus probably Mary did not make a vow of celibacy before the annunciation because Christ was not yet there, and virginity was an unheard of ideal for Jews at that time. But when Mary gave her wholehearted "yes" it meant for her also life-long celibacy, to live the Lord unreservedly.

5. Joseph accepts the mystery of Incarnation as Mary does. He also resolves on celibacy. We seldom speak about his celibacy. Usually we hear only about the virginity of Mary. And yet both belong together: her and his complete dedication to the will of God, her and his complete love of the Lord.

And ever since the first two persons remained virgins for Christ's sake, offering him their undivided love, many other have followed and will still follow, remaining celibate for the Lord's sake, offering him their undivided love and dedication. And those who have a marriage partner in life will model their love for the marriage partner after the undivided love between Jesus and Mary, between Jesus and Joseph.

6. Joseph even welcomes Christ incarnate and obeys the word of God wholeheartedly. Luke mentions about Mary that she said her "yes" (Lk. 1:38). In the life of Joseph this obedience to God's word is not less outspoken. Three times it is mentioned that an angel in a dream spoke to Joseph and three times it is mentioned that he did as the angel had directed him. After being informed that the unborn life in the womb of his wife is of the Holy Spirit and he shall take her into his house, Matthew continues: "When Joseph awoke he did as the angel of the Lord had directed him and received her into his home as his wife" (Mt. 1:24). — An angel in a dream tells Joseph to flee to Egypt. And the evangelist continues: "Joseph got up and took the child and his mother and left that night for Egypt" (Mt. 2:14). — Similarly Joseph is told by an angel in a dream that Herod has died and the Holy family can return. And again Matthew adds: "He (Joseph) got up, took the child and his mother, and returned to the land of Israel" (Mt. 2:21). — And when Joseph learns that Archealaus has taken the place of his father Herod, Joseph does not dare to return to Bethlehem

as he apparently had intended. But because of a word of God in a dream "Joseph went to the region of Galilee" (Mt. 2:22). Incarnation means complete dedication to God, loving obedience to the word of God.

7. Incarnation means celibacy on the part of Joseph. He is not the natural father of Jesus. And thus Joseph had in mind to tiptoe out of the great mystery, since apparently God had no job for him. And yet, Joseph has a great mission to perform in the life of Jesus:

(1) He shall give the son of Mary his name, given to him by God: Jesus which means savior, the one who frees his people from their sins. Thus Joseph shall not call him Joseph Junior nor shall Joseph himself decide on the name. Rather, God selects the name. But Joseph shall give it which is the right of the father. And thus Joseph becomes the legal or adopted father with all the rights that go along.

(2) Joseph shall incorporate the coming child into the people of Israel. Joseph has been addressed by the angel as "Son of David." Thus he shall make Jesus the "Son of David" according to the human lineage (Rom. 1:3).

(3) That of course means also that he takes care of Mary, his wife, with all the loving concern of a husband. Would it had been in our times, she would have gotten the family name of Joseph.

CHRISTMAS — SOLEMNITY OF THE LORD'S BIRTH (December 25, 1980) Midnight Mass

The feast of the Nativity of our Lord has become one of the main feasts of the Church, second only to Easter, and like it the center of a cycle of other feasts dependent upon it. This was not always so. Christmas Day is rather a latecomer to the calendar, first testified to in Rome in the year 336. Unlike Easter, it was not taken over from the Jewish calendar. Nor was it determined by an exact knowledge of the date of Christ's birth, nor was it (as Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and other feasts around Easter) determined by the exploitation of the local possibilities at Bethlehem, although the Basilica of the Nativity at Bethlehem, the oldest preserved of Christianity, was started to be constructed in the year 326 (so Donato Baldi and Eugene Hoade in their Guide to the Holy Land) and thus almost coincides with the earliest evidence of the feast. Rather,

it was determined by the widespread pagan festivals of the winter solstice. When the Romans were celebrating the beginning of the return of light after the shortest day, the Christians as a counteraction would celebrate Christ as "the light from true light" by commemorating Christ's birth.

Every priest may celebrate or concelebrate three Masses on Christmas day. The three Masses at midnight, at dawn, and during the day are the same in the three different cycles of A, B, and C. Thus the Mass at midnight only will be explained this year, the Mass at dawn will be unfolded next year and the Mass during the day in 1982.

The good news at Christmas according to the liturgy of the Mass at midnight is: A Son (first reading and gospel) has been born for us and for all (second reading) of ancient lineage (first reading), the savior (gospel) and the prince of peace (first reading and gospel).

First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-3.5-6 (Hebrew)

In the two campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III in 734 and 732 there took place the separation of the western, eastern and northern provinces of Israel, assumed by Is. 8:23, and their transformation into Assyrian provinces. The faith of the Israelites was thereby faced with the question whether God had abandoned his people and his land forever to the enemies of Israel, or whether he intended to reunite them and awaken them to new life under a glorious ruler, corresponding to the ideal picture described in the royal psalms. Here, as in 10:33-11:8, Isaiah is making a confession of faith in the future of his people, which is based upon God's purpose of salvation. For the sake of his glorification in the sight of the nations he will fulfill the promises he has given, and bring to reality an empire in which all Israel is united and at peace, under a second David.

Is 8:23 belongs to the oracle of salvation (Is. 8:23-9:6). Then we have five stanzas: (1) 8:23 promises a *reversal*, the change of the future. The prophet had foretold the total collapse of the northern kingdom itself (chs. 7 and 8). Now he adds a prophecy of salvation. (2) Is. 9:1-2 describe the rejoicing of the redeemed: They will walk in light again and have an abundant harvest. (3) Is. 9:3-4 pictures the inauguration of the kingdom of peace. The Assyrians had enslaved the

Israelites under the burden of tributes and forced labor; the Israelite captives were like draught animals urged to their work by their driver with a stick. The burdensome yoke will be taken away, as previously on the day of Midian, when Gideon struck the Midianites (Jgs. 6:33ff). (4) Is. 9:5 pictures the enthronement of the savior king. "A child is born" means in the original setting the adoption of the king by God in the moment which he ascends the throne as we see in Psalm 2:7. That second David is a (a) *Wonder-Counselor*: He knows what to do and needs no outside advice. His own plans attain their goal because God guides his thoughts. (b) He is *God-Hero (Mighty God)*. Only here and in Ps. 45:6 is the king referred to as 'god' in the Old Testament. (c) He is *Father-Forever*: His rule will be fatherly, beneficent and righteous. (d) He is *Prince-of-Peace*: In peace all things, animals and human beings can follow their destiny undisturbed. (5) Is. 9:6 is the conclusion and finale: The new king will rule as a second David. Peace will never end in his kingdom as his kingdom will not end, because it will be just and righteous.

Which king did Isaiah have in mind? Some think this oracle of salvation was a liturgical anthem to be sung on the occasion of the coronation of the Davidic kings of Judah. Every time a new descendant of David ascended the throne it was hoped that this king would prove to be the ideal king. We can clearly see nobody came up to the ideal.

Thus Christian faith reinterprets this passage, applying it to Christ, the true David. He fulfills all above statement to the fullest.

Reading of the Good News: Luke 2:1-14

Luke, the "historian" among the evangelists introduces the birth narrative of Christ with an historical setting which explains why and how a simple historical fact (census) turned out to become a salvation event. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not in Nazareth. But Luke does not want to give us a diary of events as one would expect it from a historian in our days. He reports history of salvation, where the details of the narrative often are symbolic and biblical. Yet on the other side, often enough Luke is backed up by historical records. But to look for the historical exactitude should not be our main concern.

Thus there is the historical difficulty about the census. Luke dates it during the period when Quirinus was legate of

Syria, which according to Flavius Josephus and Acts 5:37 was A.D. 6-9. This is immediately after Judea came under Roman rule, a more plausible reason for a Roman census than at the time Judea was still a quasi-independent kingdom under Herod the Great. But according to Mt. and Lk. Jesus was born in the reign of Herod, i.e., no later than 4 B.C. (death of Herod).

Attempts to vindicate Luke's account of the nativity census are: Quirinius had already been in Syria as early as 10-7 B.C. with a legatine commission and then the census of Lk took place. Others think that the census was inaugurated at the time Lk. mentions and completed at the time Josephus indicates. Others translates Lk. 2:2 with: "This census took place before the one that was made when Quirinius was legate of Syria."

The census referred to is probably not a population census to find out how many inhabitants a country has (that is usually done in one day, and everybody does it at the place he lives) but (1) an assessment of real estate and (2) an assessment of capital worth or capital value. Then one can understand why everybody had to go to the place where he had some real estate to indicate where it was and how much it was and then to be taxed accordingly. Wives had to go along as we know from Egyptian documents. Usually a committee would go from city to city and all people had to appear before this committee and that would take time, several months for a town like Bethlehem. After the annunciation Mary had gone to her cousin Elizabeth for three months. Shortly after her return Joseph married Mary and not too long after this they went to Bethlehem in plenty of time before the birth of Jesus for the census. Since many people had to stay in Bethlehem for some time (nobody knew exactly when it would be his turn), the only inn (caravansery) was filled, and Joseph may not have had close relatives in Bethlehem, either. What was more natural for him as carpenter-bricklayer than to prepare one of the many caves around Bethlehem as a place to stay for him and Mary for some time, one of the caves which also shepherds would use for their flocks. However poor or bearable the actual reality might have been for Joseph and Mary, Luke sees it more theologically: "There was no room for them in the inn" (Lk. 2:7): His own people did not accept the Messiah

Mary gives birth to her "first-born son" (Lk. 2:7). This title indicates the special rights every first-born son had and

does not say anything about whether other sons followed. She wraps him up in long strips of cloth, as customary in Palestine, so that the child would grow straight and strong.

Shepherds in that locality are keeping night watch over their flocks. The poor, as typical for Luke, are first to receive the message of salvation. Shepherds were often despised; because of their profession they could not observe all the laws about levitical cleanness. Some considered them as so destitute as to be always on the point of stealing and therefore being untrustworthy.

The angel surrounded by the glory (shining light) of God tells the shepherds not to fear and gives them a message of great joy: This day in David's city a *savior* has been born for them, the *Messiah* (Christ) and *Lord*. These three titles bring out the greatness of Jesus: he is the savior (saving us from sin), the anointed and the Lord.

The sign given to the shepherds (in a manger they will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes) proves how really human Jesus is, just an ordinary baby, and even a poor baby lying in a manger.

Suddenly there are with the angel a multitude of angels praising God and singing out the effect of the advent in salvation history: glory to God, and peace (with the full meaning of *Shalom*) among men. *Doxa* means divine honor, divine splendor, divine power, visible divine radiance, in short, glory. Peace is (this verse 14 is typical Hebrew without verb, which has to be added and is Indicative, not Optative [i.e. *is not shall be*]) on earth to men of good will, that is, of God's good pleasure. The phrase does not refer to the good dispositions of men themselves but to the predilection of God. God is not to be thought of as taking delight in man's goodness, rather he bestows goodness of man through his divine election and mercy.

HOMILY

THE HISTORICAL EVENT: CHRIST BORN AS HUMAN SON AND YET SAVIOR AND PRINCE OF PEACE

1. Nobody would have ever thought that *the* historical event, Christ's birth would happen the way it happened. Paul would say; "When the designated time had come God sent forth his son born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal.

4:4. And Luke cannot stress enough, especially in the infancy narrative that everything happened exactly as God has planned it so that in each case something was fulfilled Luke 1:1.45; 2:29.39). And yet, many things happened in such a "profane" way that it did not look like something divine. But that's exactly how God shapes history of salvation, by events which look so human.

2. That starts already with the date of Christmas. It does not commemorate the exact historical day of Christ's birth, of which the gospels do not give us a clear indication. (Some think it could have been in March.) To counteract the danger of idolatry in Rome, when the Romans would hail the son god at the time when the longest night was over and the days would become longer again, the Christians would hail Christ as the "true light from true light". And what could have looked like an accident was in reality foretold by the prophet Isaiah long ago: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Is. 9:1).

3. Even more human or shall one say like chance, looks the census of Caesar Augustus and the resulting birth of Christ in Bethlehem. And yet, God was behind that "Chance". To go to Bethlehem for some months must have been a hardship. That committee that did the assessment of real estate and the assesment of capital value and thus taxed people according to their property took its time. After all, it was the first in Judea. It was double hard for a newly married couple which was awaiting anxiously the birth of the first child. They would have deserved tranquility at home to prepare everything well. And yet, what could have looked so ruthless and hard, was providential after all and shows that God's plans are always wonderful: Jesus was conceived to an engaged couple. Had the Jews ever found this out, Jesus would have been despised as illegitimate because it was unheard of for Jews that engaged people had sexual relations. Joseph and Mary married at a time when one could not yet see that Mary was with child. And shortly afterwards they left for Bethlehem where they arrived as married couple. So there was nothing unusual when Jesus was born to a married couple. Nobody in Bethlehem knew how long Joseph and Mary had been married. They returned to Bethlehem only after many months (after Christ's birth they stayed at least for fourteen days in Bethlehem, then fled to Egypt and stayed there for some time till they returned). Thus nobody in Bethlehem ever found out when Jesus was conceived.

4. Joseph, the just man, fulfilled all justice, obeying the order of Caesar Augustus, seeing in it God at work, although he did not fully understand. He the son of David went to the city of David, to Bethlehem. Herod was after the descendants of David because they were his competition. And so Joseph took a risk going to Bethlehem. But he went just the same.

5. Caesar Augustus at that time was hailed as "prince of peace". The Roman Senate had erected for him in Rome the *Ara Pacis Augustae* (the altar of peace of Augustus) after his victories in Spain and Gaul in the first century B.C. He could not guess that through his order of the census the real prince of peace would be born in Bethlehem.

Isaiah had foretold the Messiah as the Wounder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever and the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:5). As there was a wonderful harmony in paradise between God and man, man and man, man and animals, man and world, so and even more it would be in the time of the Messiah. In such a peace all human beings can follow their eternal destiny.

6. That peace was broken because of man's sin which caused alienation between God and man, man and his wife, man and animal, man and his world. People were sitting and walking in darkness (Is. 9:1; Lk. 1:79). But with the birth of Christ light was shining, there was the nearness of God; there was the Glory, which shone around the angel in Bethlehem so that he and his companions could sing: "Glory, shining light, divine splendor and radiance is the domain where God lives." And that splendor is now with the birth of Christ shining on men of his favor so that they will come out of darkness of sin and the result will be peace (Lk. 2:14). In other words, the grace of God appears with Christ's birth (Tit. 2:11) and brings salvation to all men so that we reject godless ways and worldly desires and await the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:14) when he comes in his final parousia.

7. This *doxa*, glory and thus peace is given to all men on whom God's favor rests. The first are the shepherds. They are called by God. Humanly speaking a poor choice, since they were despised. And yet, God's choice is often different from our choice. The good news was not brought to the Scribes nor the Pharisees, nor the other leaders of Israel.

8. These leaders, this his own people did not accept the Lord. "There was no room in the inn" Luke says significantly (Lk. 2:7).

9. The shepherds, however, listened and acted. They went to look for the child and found him and were proclaiming the good news to all who wanted to hear it, including our Blessed Lady (Lk. 2:15-19). Good news wants to be spread and not to be kept closed up in our heart.

10. And that good news is: this really human baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, is not only human, but is the Savior and the Prince of peace.

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH (Sunday after Christmas — December 28, 1980)

We just celebrated Christmas. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus became a family. The Church proposes this family, this community formed by blood and the Holy Spirit as the model of all family and societal life. The first reading is a commentary of the fourth commandment: "Honor your father and mother, especially when they are old." "Bear with one another, forgive and love one another: husband and wife — parents and children" (second reading)! Even hardships can bind a family together, if they take seeming disasters as directed by God (gospel).

First Reading: Sirach (Greek, thus NAB: 3:2-6.12-14)

Sirach contains wisdom and experience of all people, upon which he (in opposition to the Book of Proverbs) put his own stamp. In many ways it looks like life experience one also finds in Egyptian or Mesopotamian Wisdom Books. Yet Sirach gives it the religious note: Only the fear of the Lord (Sir. 3:7) can teach all this, can teach children in this case to honor father and mother. After an introductory chapter of praise of wisdom (Sir. 1) and a chapter on the duties toward God (Sir. 2) the author speaks about duties toward parents (Sir. 3:1-16).

It is a commentary on Ex. 20:12, "Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life." Long life was for a Jew the most desirable good since he did not know much about life here after yet. He who honors father and mother also atones for sins. This again is an ideal of later Judaism. We know of course, that in the strict sense only Christ atones for sins. Yet one can say in a true sense love (mentioned later) of one's parents makes up for many other sins.

Singled out is that children should take care of their parents, especially when they are old (3:12-14), even if their mind fail, or if they should become senile. They deserve the best care. Again, such care will make up for many a sin of a child.

This is the simple, but great ethic of biblical times which took for granted the subordinationistic ethic of the Hellenistic world where families were living in great clans. This in many ways is similar to family life in the Philippines where old people stay at the place they grew up. What would Sirach say to a society which banishes parents to an old people's home many kilometers away? Or leaves them to the care of social workers and the welfare state? How can we restore the personal relationships which were the strength of the old three or four generation family in a society so structured that it is impossible to return the models of the past? The question will be answered if those attending nurses in old-folks-homes treat old people with loving care as persons and consider their job a vocation, not just a profession.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 2:13-15.19-23

The infancy story of Mt. 1-2 among other purposes wants to picture Christ as the true Moses and is thus midrashic history where the details of the report are often shaped by theology and by the Old Testament source rather than by the exact historical events, without making the New Testament report a mere myth or pious story. There is a historical nucleus underneath. But our main intention should be to understand the theology Matthew wanted to convey rather than to get lost over discussions of the exact historical details.

Thus some would not try to use the gospel of today for the theme of the Holy Family, since this could be done only by a questionable extrapolation from the text, involving an illegitimate historicization. Matthew's concern, is after all, quoting Hosea 11:1 (Out of Egypt I have called my son") that Jesus is the true Moses and the true Jacob (Israel): As Israel, as Moses called out of Egypt, so Jesus is called out of Egypt. This is explained in the first half of the gospel, Mt. 2:13-15.

The second half (Mt. 2:19-23) explains that it is not by chance that Jesus goes back to Nazareth: he originates from Nazareth. Jews contemptuously would call him a Nazorean. But for Matthew probably Isaiah 11:1 gives the clue: "But

a shoot (*hotër*) shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud (*neser*) shall blossom. The term *neser* is enough to remind a Jew of Nazareth.

But probably without overtaxing the historicity of the report we also can see that for Matthew Joseph is an important figure in the infancy narrative (for Luke it is more Mary): Things come about, facts happen as God wants them to happen among others because Joseph is listening to God and his messenger and promptly obeys: Thus he takes Mary home (as we saw the fourth Sunday of Advent); he goes to Bethlehem for the census — (Christmas Feast); he flees to Egypt (Mt. 2:14) and he returns to Bethlehem (Mt. 2:22) and then to Nazareth (Mt. 2:22).

Joseph is the father and the head whom the others obey. And yet, he exercises his authority more by serving. He listens to God and carries out God's command to serve the Child Jesus by preserving him from a particular danger. Joseph is the intermediary between Mary and Jesus and through Joseph God keeps his protecting and over the Holy Family.

Three times the pericope of today singles out this listening obedience to God: "Get up, (an angel of the Lord says in a dream) take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you otherwise. Herod is searching for the child to destroy him. Joseph got up and took the child and his mother and left that night for Egypt" (Mt. 2:13-14). — Again the angel of the Lord appears in a dream and says: "Get up, take the child and his mother, and return to the land of Israel" Mt. 2:19-21). — And when Joseph hears that Archealaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Juda, he was afraid to go back there. But only "because of a warning received in a dream, Joseph went to the region of Galilee" (Mt. 2:22).

HOMILY

THE HOLY FAMILY MODEL FOR ALL FAMILY AND SOCIETAL LIFE

1. The Feast of the Holy Family presents us Jesus, Mary and Joseph as a model for every family life, yes for every community life. The family is the smallest community; but in many ways the most important one. If it is healthy many other bigger communities will be healthy also.

2. There are some fundamental virtues for every family, for every community: The Apostle tells us: "*Bear with one another*" (Col. 3:13)! We all are limited and have our faults. Thus one of the experiences of living together will be these limitations of our character. As hard as we try to improve our faults, many of them will stay with us for life. And the same is true with the members of our family or our community. Thus not the smallest insight is: "*Bear with one another!*" Make allowances for somebody's limitations. Take him as he is! After all, you silently expect the same from others, unless you fool yourself and (wrongly) think you have no faults or only lovable faults. How often are we irritated and shout at somebody for the smallest mistake or fault that we are surprised about ourself and do not recognize ourselves any more.

3. "*Forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you*" (Col. 3:13) the Apostle continues. To forgive is probably one of the most typical Christian virtues and is possible only because Christ forgave and forgives us all the time. The more natural reaction when we suffer an injustice or even something mean or cruel is to retaliate and to take revenge. "*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*" (Mt. 5:38) is a policy which as such belongs to the Old Testament. But if we are honest, we must admit that we, even here in the Christian Philippines after four hundred years of Christianity often enough find it difficult to forgive and look for an excuse why in this and that particular case we have a right to retaliate, or to take justice in our hands, e.g., if somebody of our relatives was killed in a traffic accident and we want to lynch that reckless driver, or if a security guard shoots another security guard who has got his better paying job.

To take revenge is as old as mankind. Lamech a descendant of Cain was already boasting: "*Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, listen to my utterance: 'I have killed a man for wounding me, a boy for my bruising me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-seven fold'*" (Gen. 4:23). In other words, he is bragging that he will take revenge any time somebody provokes him. As counter-answer Christ told Peter when he asked the Lord how often he should be willing to forgive and Peter generously suggested seven times (after all, the Talmud suggested only three times); (you must forgive); "*not seven times I say, seventy times seven times*" (Mt. 18:22), i.e., as often as somebody asks for forgiveness.

And we are able to forgive because the Lord has forgiven us first and still forgives us. He died for us, not as friends (which would be great already) but when we were still his enemies (Rom. 5:10). A forgiven man must always forgive.

4. We must be *kind* to the members of our family (Col. 3:12). Addressed to the fathers the Apostle formulates it: "Fathers, *do not nag* your children lest they lose heart" (Col. 3:21). To nag is the opposite of kindness. A kind person changes place with his partner, does for him what he would like other people to do to him. He believes in the goodness of the partner, takes him for better than he is to make him better. This of course must be true in a special way for parents and educators. A kind person has kind thoughts and interpretations of the behavior of the partner. And since we are what we think, more than what we speak and do, a kind person is especially kind in his thoughts, from where everything else flows. We have to take people as they are if we want to make them better. We must not first want all kinds of changes in them before we accept them. We must not overlook the faults in somebody whom we love, we even must have the courage to tell them the truth. But there is a certain kind of constant criticism which is the product of misguided love. Mary Lamb said: "Why is it that I never seem to be able to do anything to please my mother?" And John Newton remarked: "I know that my father loved me. But he did not seem to wish me to see it." A kind person openly acknowledges the good somebody else does, not in a flattering but in a sincere way. We need such acknowledgements in order to grow. Some people have a hard time to pray the "Our Father" because their father is too stern with them. It is a known fact that the father of Martin Luther was such a severe father.

5. Such kindness leads with necessity to the other advice of the Apostle: "Over all these virtues put on *love*, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect" (Col. 3:14). In Rom. 13:8-9 Paul formulates it this way: "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,' and any other commandment there may be are all summed up in this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" In the Orient people were wearing long clothes held in position by a belt so that one did not stumble or step on them and thus fall. Love is that belt. He who loves observes all the commandments, he who does not love does not observe any commandment.

6. For the Apostle this commandment to love characterizes also the relation between husband and wife. For him who grew up in a subordinationistic society it was obvious that the woman would obey the husband as children obeyed their parents. In a time of women's lib this may sound old-fashioned, at the best conditioned by the outlook of St. Paul and his society at that time which has to be brought up to date. Yet it has to be examined carefully what is time-conditioned (and thus can change) and what is founded in the nature of man and woman. But in any case, if a man takes the advice to love his wife seriously, the other question if a woman shall obey her husband or has the same rights concerning authority (there is no doubt in the Scripture that both have the same dignity) becomes less urgent. "Husbands, love your wives. Avoid any bitterness toward them" (Col. 3:19) is taken up by Eph. 5:25-28: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church. He gave himself up for her... Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself."

7. Concerning our relations to our parents we shall honor them. After all, they gave us our life, and all we have we owe them. We here in the Philippines have grown up in a similar society as that of biblical times where there are several generations still living together and reverence for the elders is expected and comes natural. The two motivations Scripture gives for honoring father and mother, i.e., that we may gain a long life and that many sins will be forgiven us may be a little old-fashioned, but it is still true in the sense that such reverence for parents covers and makes good for many a fault a child may have.

Our real test if we love and revere our parents will come at the time when they are getting old, weak, maybe even a little senile. Do we see in them the experience which can still help us, the possibility to practice our patience and our supernatural love, or are annoyed by the little efficiency and the old-fashioned ideas of the old parents?

8. Children shall obey and parents give orders. That old advice is still valid. Yet already Scripture, as we saw, does not only see this relation; rather parents shall love their children and not aggravate them, nor punish them too much; otherwise these children will hide things, become withdrawn, not tell the truth any more, get their additional allowance by stealing the money from their parents or lolo.

9. Parents, fathers shall be prudent, intelligent and use their resources in the education of their children. But more, they shall listen to God and try to fulfill his will which reveals itself slowly, step by step. St. Joseph is the model. God did not tell him all the plans at once, but only one step at a time. God through the edict of Caesar Augustus tells him to go to Bethlehem for the census (Lk. 2:1-5). An angel tells him to marry Mary (Mt. 1:20-24). Later an angel advice him to flee to Egypt (Mt. 2:13-15), to return to Palestine (Mt. 2:20) and finally to go back to Nazareth (Mt. 2:22). God also acts in our life and in that of our family through events which seem really human, too human, as the decree of Caesar Augustus. And even if we do not have such extraordinary events as the flight to Egypt we should practice the same attentive listening to God's will as Joseph did in order to find out God's plans for us and our family.

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD
(Octave Day of Christmas — January 1, 1981)

The Octave Day of Christmas got above new title and thus a new accent, the divine motherhood of Our Lady. As a matter of fact it has been the oldest celebration of Our Blessed Lady in the Roman Liturgy. At the same time we celebrate the imposition of the holy name of Jesus. Pope Paul VI made the beginning of the new (civil) year a day of prayer for peace.

In the son born of a woman (second reading), Mary, who named Him Jesus (gospel), who is Yahweh, we are blessed (first reading) and made sons (second reading).

First Reading: Numbers 6:22-27

The Book of Numbers is so called because it twice refers to the census of the Hebrew people (Num. 1:3 and 26) and it pays special attention to numerical quantities concerning offerings and other regulations. But it also describes the continuation of the journey begun in Exodus. Our first reading of today is taken from the first part which presents (1) the census of the tribes and their departure (Num. 1:1-4:49) and (2) various laws, the fifth and last of which is the priestly blessing (Num. 6:22-27).

The introduction (v. 23) places the blessing of vv. 24.26 on the lips of the priests, represented by Aaron and his sons. The act of blessing was part of the priests' duties (Deut. 21:5. When kings such as David (cf. 2 Sam. 6:18) or Solomon (1 Kgs. 8:14:55) blessed the people then they were taking upon themselves priestly functions. Blessing had its place within the sanctuary. It could be imparted in an act of worship (so Ps. 118:26) or when the participants were dismissed (2 Sam. 6:18; Lev. 9:22).

The above blessing is very old. It consists of three lines with two jussive sentences each, where the name of Yahweh stands in the middle. The first line has three, the second five, and the third seven words in Hebrew. By means of this three-fold repetition of the divine name Yahweh (which in some translation is rendered with "lord") God is strongly emphasized as the bestower of the blessing, the priest is only the mediator. V. 27, which does not belong to the blessing any more, makes that very clear: "And I (Yahweh) will bless them" — if one would try to imitate the Hebrew it would look like this:

Bless you Yahweh and keep you!

Make his face to shine upon you Yahweh and be gracious to you!

Lift up his countenance upon you Yahweh and give you peace!

The content of the blessing: "Blessing" includes all of God's gifts. "To keep" refers to God's protection, in particular to God's help in the face of every misfortune and disaster. The first half of the second line in an anthropomorphism (make his face shine) refers to God's benevolence and favor on the recipients. We find this expression often in psalms, e.g. Ps. 31:16; 67:1-2; 80:4.7.19). To "be gracious" includes pleasure. The third line starts with a similar anthropomorphism as the second line: God shall turn his face toward us in friendship. (If one is angry, one lets the face fall; cf. Gen. 4:5-6). Such a turning of God's face toward us brings peace, brings a state of wholeness, absolute well-being. In the context this is earthly well-being. And the blessing in the first sense is dealing with God's good gifts in this earthly life. But nothing forbids us to take it in the fullest sense.

Reading of the Good News: Luke 2:16-21

This is the same gospel as the one of the Christmas Mass at dawn with the difference it starts at verse 16 instead of verse 15, and that it goes on to include verse 21, the circumcision and naming of Christ. This is definitely the climactic verse of today's reading. By wanting to be circumcized Christ placed himself under the law (Gal. 4:4) and he received the name "Jesus" = God (Yahweh) saves, who blesses us (Num. 6:24-27): Many great men received their name when circumcised: Abraham (Gen. 17:14), Isaac (Gen. 21:4). Name for a Jews meant the essence of a person. Jews would not pick up an arbitrary name. Jesus is our savior; that is his essence. "There is no salvation in any one else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved (but the name of Jesus)" (Acs 4:12).

The name "Yahweh" means "I am who I am", i.e., God has life by himself, is the *ens a se*. — It means "I bring into being whatever comes into being" (so W. F. Albright). — But it even more probably means "I am ready to save whoever wants to be saved." This explanation is suggested especially from the context in Ex. 3, where God reveals himself to Moses when people are oppressed and cry out for help. God answers this cry by revealing his name: "I am close to help".

Jesus in the gospel of John calls himself often the I AM (Jn. 13:19; 8:58; 8:24.28; 18:5.6.8; 4:26; 6:20. He is the absolute I AM and thus the life, the truth, the bread of life, the resurrection, the true shepherd, in short: the salvation.

Thus what we read in Num. 6:22-27 we can also apply to Jesus. His name is a pledge for forgiveness of sins, a guarantee that our prayers are granted (Jn. 16:23), and consolation in temptations.

HOMILY**THE SON OF GOD, BORN OF MARY, MAKES US SONS**

1. Christmas is not just a sentimental story of a baby in a manger. Rather, Christ became man, was born of a woman that we might become godlike, that we might become sons, sons of God. This is the good news of Christmas which the liturgy of the Octave of Christmas tells us.

2. Mary is the mother of God. Without her Christ would have never become man. Christology and Mariology belong together. Mary gives birth to her divine Son, and thus Mary leads to Christ. But on the other hand: without Mary there is no God-man. Slowly the first Christians were formulating their faith in Mary. Gal. 4:4-5 is probably a pre-Pauline credal formula: "God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, so that we might become adopted sons." The name of Mary is not yet mentioned. But it is clear who is meant. That expression *gyne* (woman) occurs also in Gen. 3:15 (I will put enmity between you and the woman), Jn. 2:4 (Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me? My hour has not yet come) and Jn. 19:26 (Woman, there is your son). This woman is the counterpart of the *kyrios* = the Lord. Of course, one cannot say that the pre-Pauline formula or St. Paul saw that already clearly. Yet it is true, the *theotokos*, the mother of God, as later theologians called Mary is also the one who helped him make us sons.

3. To be born of a woman, means of course also to be real human. Christ was placed under the law (Gal. 4:4), when the designated time had come. That also meant for him to be circumcised (Lk. 2:21) and thus being incorporated into the Jewish people with all the obligations of the Mosaic Law. He was a man like us with the exception that he not could sin.

4. By being placed under the law and thus under sin and death — because nobody can observe all the laws which failure results in sin and because of sin we die — Christ freed us from law, sin and death, a topic which St. Paul unfolds especially in the letter to the Romans.

Christ took upon himself all limitations of mankind, he even "became sin for us," i.e., he took upon himself all sins of mankind and atoned for them. He did not sin himself.

5. Another way of putting this is: "By nature (we deserved) God's wrath" (Eph. 2:3). Then God sent his Son born of a woman that we should become adopted sons. (Gal. 4:4-5). The proof that we are sons is the fact that God has sent forth into our hearts the spirit of his Son which cries out "Abba!" ("Father!") (Gal. 4:6).

6. God is our father, we are his sons. That we have heard so often that it does not strike us enough. And yet it is not obvious. A god among pagans was often regarded as the ancestor or progenitor of his people. Thus we have a prayer of king Gudea of Lagash to the city of Gatumdug:

I have no mother, you are my mother,
 I have no father, you are my father,
 You have conceived me in your heart,
 you have brought forth me in your temple.

7. But Yahweh, the God of Israel, is not the Father in this sense. The Israelites consciously used the title as a metaphor. God is Father because he formed the Israelite nation. Moses was commissioned to tell Pharaoh: "Thus says the Lord; Israel is my first-born son" (Ex. 4:22). Through the Exodus and the covenant on Sinai Israel became God's first born. This fact Hosea 11:1 expresses saying: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Yahweh was Father to his people:

For you are our Father,
 through Abraham does not know us
 and Israel does not acknowledge us;
 you, O Lord, are our Father (Is. 63:16).

8. Israel as a people was son of God and thus the Israelites were his children, but as members of the nation rather than as individuals. And in the older books (see Is. 63:16) the statement of God as Father is used as an *enunciation*, not as an *address*.

9. Later books of the Old Testament show a more personal relationship between the individual and God. So for the first time we find in Sir. 23:14f a personal address of God as Father. But even then it is not just "Father"; rather some other titles are added, i.e., Lord, of my life": "Lord, Father and Master of my life, permit me not to fall by them!" namely by bad thoughts, evil words, bad enemies. And in Sir 23:4 the author repeats: "Lord, Father and God of my life, abandon me not into their control!"

10. There is, however, no single Jewish text in the Old Testament or in Rabbinical Literature where God is addressed as "Abba" (Father) without any addition. But this unheard of fact happens in the New Testament where Jesus always calls God his Father, usually with the Greek term *patēr*, so especially in the gospel of John (137 times, most of which refer to God the Father). But since Jesus spoke and prayed in Aramaic, it was the Aramaic term "Abba", which is preserved three times in the New Testament: above Gal. 4:6, Rom. 8:15 and Mk. 14:36.

11. Christ makes us his brothers, sons of the Father, although, of course, he is Son by nature and we are sons by

adoption. And thus he, respectively the Spirit of the Son encourages and empowers us to pray the prayer of the Son, the "Our Father", in short, "Abba, Father!" No wonder that the "Our Father" in the Mass is usually introduced with the words: "Encouraged by divine command we dare saying: 'Our Father'."

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD (January 4, 1981)

The Feast of Epiphany originated in the East (i.e. East, when one looks from Rome), where it was primarily a commemoration of the Lord's baptism, the first "epiphany = appearing, self-manifestation of the Lord. Later came the second "epiphany", the self-manifestation of Christ over the water of Cana changed into wine. And when the feast spread to the West, it became primarily a commemoration of the revealing of Jesus to the magi. This interpretation of the Epiphany remained however peculiar to the West. January 6 was chosen for the date of Epiphany because St. Epiphanius suggests that in Egypt and Arabia a feast in honor of the birth of *Aiōn*, daughter of the virgin Korē in connection with the winter solstice was celebrated on that day. Furthermore, Pliny, St. Epiphanius and St. John Chrysostom speak about certain wonders connected with January 5: spring water was changed into wine; water drawn on that day never turned foul. In order to christianize both the pagan feast and the wonders, the feast of Epiphany was celebrated.

Epiphany is the feast of the universal Church. In the persons of the magi the first non-Jews come to the Lord who reveals himself to them (gospel). The prophecy of Isaiah 60 (first reading) is starting to be fulfilled: "They all (nations) gather together, they come to you." Yes, in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are now co-heirs with the Jews, members of the same body (second reading).

First Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

Trito Isaiah (Is. 56-66) was composed by an unknown author for the Jews back from exile (ca. 538-510 B.C.). The first enthusiasm was soon spent, the expected salvation did not come as fast as some had hoped for. Many Jews did not even come back from exile; they preferred staying in Babylonia. Thus Trito Isaiah stressed the importance of true piety and told people that salvation would come in spite of all obstacles.

Is. 60:1-22 (today's reading brings only the first six verses) is homogenous and is a unity: Zion is told that her salvation is at hand. Zion shall arise and shine. Yahweh's light and glory comes, dispelling the darkness and people and kings come to this light (60:1-3).

These people coming to Zion will bring "your sons from afar, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms" (Is. 60:4), i.e. they will bring the Israelites back from exile and the return will be completed.

Secondly, these people represent pretty many nations, all nations. Mentioned are the sea-people around the Mediterranean; Midian and Ephah in the North-West of Arabia (Gen. 25:4 mentioned as related); Sheba (from here the queen came to Solomon, 1 Kgs. 10:1-13); Kedar and Nebaioth (Is. 60:7, = also mentioned in Gen. 25 25:13).

And these people bring their gifts along, camels, dromedaries (from Midian and Ephah), gold and frankincense (from Sheba), sheep and rams (from Kedar and Nebaioth).

One can see how this reading of the eschatological pilgrimage of the Gentiles to Jerusalem, following the rebuilding of the city prefigures the journey of the magi. The Incarnation replaces the return from Babylon as God's great act of salvation. Christ is shining as the great light. One can also see how some verses of Is. 60 have colored the narrative of the magi in Mt. 2: the gold and frankincense of Is. 60:6 in Mt. 2:11. Other details popular legend added to the story of the magi taking it from Is. 60: the kings from Is. 60:3 and the camels from Is. 60:6.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 2:1-22

We have seen already several times that the infancy story in Mt. 1-2 is not a piece of world history, but midrashic history: by reflecting on especially Old Testament texts the evangelist tries to picture Christ as the true Moses and the true Israel (Jacob). There is an historical nucleus; the small details, however, are more used to make a theological point than to give us information about the exact when and where of history.

King Herod, called the Great because of his political astuteness and his achievements in building, which included the temple in Jerusalem was most of his life, especially in throne. Thus he killed many people, among others his brother-

in-law Aristobulus (35 B.B.), his uncle and brother-in-law Josephus (34 B.), Hyrcanus II, the grandfather of his wife Mariamme (30 B.C.), Mariamme herself (29 B.C.), his eldest son Antipater (4 B.C.) only five days before his own death in 4 B.C. This background explains why Herod was greatly disturbed when he heard something about a newborn king (Mt. 2:3).

Herod was still alive. Thus Christ must have been born somewhere between 7 or 6 B.C. Astrologers from the east arrive in Jerusalem. *Magoi* = magi were originally a Median priestly tribe of clairvoyants who later became adherents of the doctrine of Zarathustra and the priests of the Persian empire. But the term is also used for the Babylonian magi whom Dan. 2:4.48 calls Chaldeans. They were experts of astronomy and astrology, sometimes sorcerers. Matthew does not use the word in a derogative sense. Thus we may translate it by "sages".

Matthew says nothing about being kings. The text seems to indicate the opposite, for Herod is given the title king. Why then are the magi called kings? Popular piety took that feature from Ps. 72:10 (used as responsorial psalm today): "The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts; the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute" and above text of Is. 60:3.

The number of the three Magi has been concluded by popular piety from the three gifts. The names Gaspar, Melchor and Balthasar go back to the sixth century and are doubtful. The country from which they came is called "the east" in Mt. 2:1. Mt. 2:2.9 would be better translated, as NAB does, with "we have seen the star at its rising" instead of "in the east". Where is that "east"? It could be Persia because the name "Magi" originated there. It could be Babylonia because of the knowledge of the stars. It could be Arabia because of the gifts which are very often found there. But Matthew was not interested in these questions.

The veneration of the "three Magi", or holy kings" goes back to the 12th century, or rather is known since then. Reinald von Dassel, the chancellor of Barbarossa brought their relics from Milan to Cologne in 1164, where they are venerated in the cathedral. Most likely the relics came from Constantinople to Milan in the 5th century. The origin of these relics is uncertain.

The Magi inquire: "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We observed his star in its rising" (Mt. 2:2). Prob-

ably these Magi had contact with Jews in exile and learned about Jewish messianism (cf. Dan. 2:2). And who else should the Messiah be but the new king in Jerusalem!

The Magi followed the star. It has been discussed if this star was a natural phenomenon or not. Kepler and others saw it in a special planet or a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn and Mars in 7 B.C. But the gospel portrays it as a miraculous happening. It does not behave like a star, since it comes and goes and is not visible as long as the Magi are in Jerusalem. The source could have been Num. 24:17: "A star shall advanced from Jacob." Surprisingly Matthew does not mention this reference as being fulfilled. For Matthew it is clear that God directed the Magi whatever the exact historical reality might have been.

The question of the Magi causes great disturbance for Herod (he fears for his throne) and for the people in Jerusalem (they fear a new outbreak of wrath of Herod). Here one main intention of Matthew becomes clear: Christ was not accepted by his own; whereas the non-Jews came and looked for him.

Herod summons the chief priests and scribes to get information where the Messiah was to be born. And they answer with Micah. 5:1 combined with 2 Sam. 5:1: "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the princes of Judah, since from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."

The answer is clear, but Herod does not go himself as the Magi do. That he does even send a messenger to check on the Magi but trusts that they will come back and tell him everything about the child looks almost too naive, but could be true to life after all. Despots can be distrustful and too credulous at the same time.

The action of the star (Mt. 2:9f) implies in the evangelist's thought that it is a supernatural phenomenon, a symbol of faith leading the Gentiles to the discovery of Jesus as their king and savior. They prostrate themselves and do the child homage, offering him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Incense from Sheba is mentioned in Jer. 6:20, "gold and incense from Sheba" in Is. 60:6. Matthew adds the myrrh. "To prostrate and do homage" as such, one can do also to a human person of authority and thus we do not have to assume that the Magi saw in the child Jesus the Son of God. But Christian piety slowly has unfolded that feature as worship and also interpreted

the gifts as "gold to the king, incense to God, and myrrh to the man", which interpretation we find in the works of the poet Juvenecus, ca. 330 A.D.

Auro rex agnoscitur,	The king is acknowledged through the gold,
Homo myrrha colitur,	The man is attested to by the myrrh,
Thure Deus gentium.	God is adored through the incense.

In a dream (typical for Mt.) the Magi are told not to return to Herod. So they go back to their own country by another route, which is providential for the Holy Family: They can escape to Egypt.

HOMILY

CHRIST REVEALS HIMSELF AND IS WELCOMED BY THE MAGI, THE FIRST NON-JEWS, BUT REJECTED BY HIS OWN PEOPLE. HOW TO SEEK AND FIND CHRIST

1. From the beginning Our Lord has been found by only two classes: by those who know and those who do not know, but never by those who think that they know; He is found by shepherds and wise men, by simple and educated people. God's and Christ's divinity is so profound that it can be grasped only by the extremes of simplicity and wisdom.

2. Both had in common that they were humble and sincere, that they listened to God and his messenger, that they wanted to find God at any cost. They did not ask what their neighbors were going to do. They did not mind the sacrifices involved. They were not even discouraged when others showed indifference and hostility. They just said to themselves: "Let us go and see what the Lord has told us" (Lk. 2:15).

3. Our Lord was not born under an open sky, under which men might walk erect, but in a cave which one can enter only by stooping. The stoop is the stoop of humility. Some minds are too proud to stoop. It is only by being little that we discover anything big.

4. Christ is first found by the simple or those who do not think, for they have no time for learned study because of their ordinary routine labor, or who, if they have time, prefer, like those same shepherds to be instructed by the angels or the ambassadors of God. They accept the authority of the Church

with the same loving obedience with which a child accepts the dictates of his parents. And there are others who do not only want to know the authority of the Church, but the reason behind the authority.

But between the extremes of the simple souls who live by faith, and who are content to be children all their spiritual lives, and the learned souls like Augustine and Aquinas, there is no mean. Herod the Great, who lived within a dozen kilometers of the shepherds and was visited by the wise men on the way to the crib, never found Christ, not even in his massacre.

All the race of proud Herods and cowardly Scribes and Pharisees, from that day to this, who think that they think, have missed God either because they are too complicated to understand the simple reports of the shepherds, or too filled useless learning to grasp the only useful truth which the wise men bring. They lack docility. They disdain the idea that God might add to their knowledge by revelation.

5. Some of them, to cover up their pride, go so far as to attack the Church as something antiquated and behind the times. Humility is common to the simple and the wise; it is the condition of discovering wisdom.

6. Their own intellect helped the Magi. Science, study of nature brings us to God. Yet, it was not quite enough to find Christ. Sacred Scripture, God's revelation had to bring them to Christ in Bethlehem.

7. The Magi may have been mocked at: "Where are you going? Are you out of your mind? Why all these efforts? Stay where you are!" And yet they went, following the star, following God's lead, even when this light disappeared at times and left them dumbfounded. It came back again.

8. The reaction of Herod and the priests and scribes must have been a great disappointment for the Magi. They come from afar under great sacrifices. And Christ's own people sit at his hosedoor, so to say and act dumb, are indifferent, and even hostile. Was it all a mistake to come that far?

9. Herod through the scribes gives the requested information: the Messiah shall be born in Bethlehem as Micah foretold. And so Herod tells the Magi: "Go to Bethlehem, follow your nose, go straight south, seven kilometers. You cannot miss it." Herod is a signpost, no guide who would go along. Yet the Magi in all their disappointment follow his advice, although he himself does not do what he says. What are we in our life? Guide or signpost?

10. Herod considers Christ an intruder for whom Herod has no place. He has his own ideas about the Messiah which the Messiah must follow rather than that he would welcome the Messiah who has no interest in Herod's throne. Christ is no competition to anybody.

11. The priests and scribes would have welcomed, not killed the Messiah at that time when they still saw in him a political hero, freeing them from such alien kings as Herod and the yoke of the Romans. But now that Herod is scared of usurpation, the leaders of the Jews do not welcome Christ either.

12. And yet with the Magi the time of the universal church has come. where all nations will bring their gifts according to their talents. No nation is superfluous and the Church is not Catholic unless all nations have brought their gifts.

13. In Christ all the Gentiles are now co-heirs with the Jews, members of the same body and sharers of the promise through the preaching of the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). The distinction between nation and nation has fallen. All are one in Christ.

FEAST OF THE LORD'S BAPTISM

**(Sunday after Epiphany — First Sunday of the Year,
January 11, 1981)**

The eastern Church, as we saw, stressed the theological rather than the historical aspect of Christ's Incarnation: the epiphany, the revelation of God in the humanity of Christ Incarnate. The whole life of Christ was a series of epiphanies of which the baptism of the Lord was the first and most important one. As a matter of fact the baptism of Christ was celebrated before the coming of the Magi. In the West the story of the Magi was so popular that the baptism of Christ could not expect more than to be celebrated on the following Sunday, which is now the First Sunday of the year.

Jesus comes to the Jordan to be baptized by the Baptist (gospel) in order to take upon himself the sins of mankind and to be revealed as the Son of God and thus start his public career as the Servant of Yahweh. This was foretold by Isaiah 42 (first reading) and outlined by Peter (Acts 10:34-43) in his speech in the house of Cornelius (second reading).

First Reading: Isaiah 42:1-4.6-7

In the Book of Deutero-Isaiah (Is. 40-55) there are four Servant of Yahweh Songs which according to content form a unity by themselves. One could take them out of the book and one would not notice that anything is missing, since they are different in content from the rest of the book. These passages are Is. 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12. To the first two songs some scholars would add some few verses of transition (done by the author of the Servant of Yahweh songs or by the final redactor) between the Servant of Yahweh Songs and the rest of the book of Deutero-Isaiah.

This *ebed Yahweh* = Servant of Yahweh is a mysterious figure. Yahweh has poured his spirit on him; he is God's chosen one (42:1). He shall be the light to the nations (42:6; 49:6). He is to restore Israel and to re-establish the covenant with God (49:6.8; 42:6). During his lifetime he will meet with success (49:4), but he has to persevere in spite of persecution (50:6) and to accomplish his mission through suffering and death which have redemptive significance (53:4-5), thus he will have many descendants (53:10).

From early times it has been discussed whether this servant is to be understood in a collective (the ideal Israel) or an individual sense (the perfect Israelite or the perfect prophet). At the time of the New Testament the individual interpretation was prevailing (cf. Acts 8:34 where the Ethiopian eunuch asks Philip: "About whom does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?") Soon the Servant of Yahweh Songs were interpreted in a Messianic sense. The early Christian community saw Jesus in the role of the Servant of Yahweh (Mt. 12:18; Acts 3:13; 3:26; 4:27.30). Jesus himself saw himself in the role of the Servant of Yahweh as we will see.

The first Servant of Yahweh Song (Is. 42:1-4) pictures the Servant as the "chosen one" with whom God is well pleased. He is full of God's Spirit (42:1). He fulfills the role of the Davidic king (2 Sam. 3:18) and the Messianic king (Ez. 34:23-24). In opposition to other kings he brings forth justice (42:1.4); he is not shouting and does not break a bruised reed, but he is kind. He will also teach (42:4), an activity never done by kings but only by prophets and priests.

If one applies this text to Christ it gets its will meaning.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 3:13-17

Matthew used Mark's account of the baptism of Jesus as his basic source. But he differs in the two points: (1) There is a little dialogue between Jesus and the Baptist. Matthew inserted this because in some way he felt that Jesus' baptism at the hand of John created difficulties. How could the sinless Jesus submit to the baptism of repentance? We would usually say: Although Jesus was free from all sins he placed himself in the line of all sinners (who took upon themselves this baptism of John) in order to take away the sins of mankind. Jesus in Matthew answers John's remark ("I should be baptized by you, yet you come to me") with: "Give in for now. We must do this if we would fulfill all of God's demands" (Mt. 3:15). With the baptism Jesus starts his public career, expressing solidarity with all men, being like them with the exception that he did not sin.

(2) The second change in Matthew compared with Mark is the wording of the voice from heaven. In Mark this voice is directly addressed to Jesus: "You are my beloved Son." The experience after baptism seems to be a personal experience of Jesus. In Matthew Christ's baptism is a epiphany, declaring to the Church the true identity of Jesus: He is the Servant of Yahweh, fulfilling in his person the mission of the servant outlined in Deutero Isaiah. Thus we read in Mt. 3:17: "A voice from heaven said: 'This is my beloved Son. My favor rests on him'."

The baptism of Jesus by John meant humiliation for Jesus: He placed himself in the line of sinners, although he was without sin, to start his public career which would end with his dying and rising for the sins of mankind. After the baptism, Jesus was revealed as the Chosen One on whom the Father's favor rests, who is filled with the Holy Spirit. And he accepted his role as Servant of Yahweh.

HOMILY**BAPTISM IN THE JORDAN:****CHRIST BEGINS HIS CAREER AS SERVANT OF YAHWEH**

1. In a time when people are looking forward to white collar jobs, manual work is not much appreciated. In some ways we are heirs of Greek outlook on life. After all, men as great as Aristotle in his book *Politics* I, ii. 1254 said "One

who is a human belonging by nature not to himself but to another is by nature a slave. Thus Greek philosophers thought it would be natural for some men to be slaves, to belong to another because they need a guide for their work, yes they cannot even live prudently, except under the direction of their master. Slavery is natural because nature intends "to make the bodies of free men and slaves different" (*ibidem*). Thus manual work was left to the slaves that the free men would have all the time for philosophizing.

2. A Hebrew would look at manual work differently. Ever since God created heaven and earth in six days and rested on the seventh, work was meaningful, was not meant as a mere drudgery; rather it had a purpose. Every Jewish rabbi, furthermore, had to learn a craft and practice it. For study of the Torah alone without manual work would make a man crazy.

3. Thus also the term slave, in Hebrew *ebed*, slowly got two connotations, especially in the Greek translation of the Jewish Christians in Palestine of the Servant of Yahweh passages, where *ebed* is translated in Greek with *pais*; thus in Is. 42:1. *Pais* can mean *slave*; it can, however, also mean *son*. For us these are almost contradictions. But this translation was obviously a whole program for the Servant of Yahweh, for Christ: by being willing to serve all the way, by being a slave to the extent of dying a death of a slave on the cross he became God's beloved Son to the fullest; became, as Rom. 1:4 puts it, God's son in power.

4. If we shortly analyze and synthesize the four Servant of Yahweh passages (Is. 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12) we see: The Servant of Yahweh (*ebed Yahweh*, in Greek *pais theou*) is the chosen one, elected by God (Is. 42:1), called before he was born (Is. 49:5). — He is full of the Holy Spirit (Is. 42:1). — And thus he can start preaching the good news (Is. 42:4; 50:4). As a matter of fact, he will be a light to the nations so that they no longer have to walk in the darkness (Is. 42:6; 49:6). He will be kind and will not shout, he will be full of sympathy and understanding (Is. 42:2-3).

5. But as Servant he will also have to suffer. In fact, there will be in him no stately bearing to make a man look at him (Is. 53:2), nor appearance that would attract anyone to him. He will be spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, one of those from whom men hide their faces (Is. 53:3).

6. Yet, he bears our infirmities and our sufferings (Is. 53:4). He is pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins.

Upon him is the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we are healed (Is. 53:5). Since we have gone astray like sheep, each following his own way God lays upon him the guilt of us all (Is. 53:6). In other words, the Servant suffers vicariously and takes our guilt away.

7. He will even get a grave among the wicked (Is. 53:9) and will receive a burial place with evil doers. Apparently he is a complete failure. But in reality through his suffering the Servant justifies many (Is. 53:11). Yes, he will get a portion among the great (Is. 53:12) and will divide the spoils with the mighty (53:12). Yes, he will see his descendants in a long life (53:10), he will become the father of many children.

8. The Servant of Yahweh thus comprises two extremes: The Servant is the chosen one, whom God has called before he was conceived in the womb of his mother, he is filled with the Holy Spirit and thus preaches and is a light to the nations; he will even prosper (Is. 52:13). This extreme would be rendered with *hyios*, Son. But then that Servant will suffer, will take the fate of a slave so that one does not recognize him any more. He is more like a worm than like a man. He will be given a grave with the wicked ones (what more does a slave deserve). This extreme would be rendered with *doulos*, slave. — But just through this apparent infamous death the Servant will atone our sins and take them away. He will see everlasting life, he will become father of many (spiritual) children. This extreme (belonging again to the first half) would be rendered again with *hyios*, Son.

9. In other words, the Greek term *pais* with which the term *ebed Yahweh*, Servant of Yahweh, is rendered, comprises the two extremes: the Servant of Yahweh goes the way of a slave all the way, till he dies on the cross. But just because of this he becomes God's beloved son to the fullest, he will have a great posterity.

10. After his baptism in the Jordan, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit came down in form of a dove and the Father's voice was heard from heaven: "This is my beloved Son. My favor rests on him" (Mt. 3:17). This clearly reminds us of the first Servant of Yahweh Song in Is. 42:1: "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased." Here we find the term *pais*, in Mt. 3:17 it is *hyjos* (Son). If we consider that the Greek term *pais* can comprise the two extremes of *doulos* (servant slave) and *hyjos* (Son) then we may assume that Matthew took the one term *hyjos* instead of *doulos*, or the ambivalent term *pais* of Is. 42:1.

What he wanted to express was: After the baptism Christ saw himself in the role of the Servant of Yahweh and accepted this role for himself.

11. That Christ saw himself as Servant of Yahweh, perhaps since baptism, is probable, though not universally accepted. That Christ saw himself as Suffering Servant of Yahweh is especially demonstrated by the Eucharistic cup word which Christ pronounced at the Last Supper: "And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'." This clearly reminds of Is. 53:11. — Similarly Christ in the dispute of the sons of Zebedee says: The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many (Mk. 10:47) again referring to Is. 53:11.

12. Christ is willing to serve and thus becoming the savior of mankind and the Son of God in power just because of this. What is our attitude to service?

FEAST OF THE SANTO NIÑO

**Proper Feast in the Philippines
(January 18, 1981)**

When Ferdinand Magellan discovered Cebu (the first bigger city in the Philippines) in April 1521, it is said that he gave the statuette of the Santo Niño to the native queen Juana as her baptismal gift at the mass baptism of natives, led by King Humabon. This became the oldest religious image of the Philippines and is connected with the beginning of Christianity in the country. Legazpi and Fra Urdaneta in 1565 gave order to house appropriately the famous image, known as the Señor Santo Niño de Cebu in the San Agustin Church in Cebu. The first chapel was made of light material. In 1575 the foundation of the first stone building was laid which in 1965 became the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño. In this Basilica, a beautiful chapel on the left side hosts the famous image. On the third Sunday of January each year, the fiesta of the Señor Santo Niño attracts many devotees from all over the country, and the feast has become a proper feast of the Philippines.

At a time of great kings and kingdoms and colonial powers Catholics, as for instance Sta. Theresa of Avila and others worshipped Christ (among others) under a statue of a child (the Santo Niño of Cebu is one presentation of many in the

sixteenth century) to show people wherein real greatness consists: Not in lording it over people (cf. Mt. 20:25), not in glorying in one's own power, but in serving, in being little, as the Lord himself who divested himself of his divinity and became man (cf. Phil. 2:5-11).

The liturgy of today tells us: A Son is given to us (first reading), a child and yet the king of peace and almighty God. God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings from heaven in Jesus (second reading). "Unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of God" (gospel).

First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-6

This is the same reading we saw in the midnight Mass of Christmas. Here in this context it tells us "A Son is given to us". Christ, although being God-Almighty and king of peace, became a little child.

Reading of the Good News: Mt. 18:1-5.10

The gospel of Matthew has given major (Mt. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 23-25) and two minor sermons (3:8-12; 28:18-20). Each sermon is prepared by narratives where the doctrine of the sermons is illustrated by happenings. These narratives therefore go ahead of the sermons. The narratives of Mt. 14-17 speak about the authority of Peter, climaxing in the promise "You are Peter, the rock, and upon this rock I will build my Church (Mt. 16-18). That he is the greatest is illustrated by three happenings: He alone walks on the water (Mt. 14:22-33), Peter is promised to become the head of the Church (16:18) and Jesus pays the temple tax for himself and for Peter only (Mt. 17:24-27). Thus the corresponding sermon in Mt. 18 illustrates who is really great, and this, of course, is true for Peter and any person in authority in the Church.

The gospel of today contains the first small pericope of this sermon. Mt. 18:1-4 speaks against ambition. Was it occasioned by the distinction given to Peter by the Lord in Mt. 17:24-27 which goes ahead immediately of Mt. 18:1-4? Or was it caused by a dispute the disciples had among themselves on the road about the question who would be the greatest as suggested in Mk. 9:33b-37? Christ answers the question: "Who is of greatest importance in the kingdom of God?" by calling a little child, placing him in their midst and saying: Unless you change (*straphête*) and become like little children you will

not enter the kingdom of God" (Mt. 18:3). Their question had expressed ambition, and from this ambition they must turn (away) and become unpretentious, simple as children. Then only they will be great. As a matter of fact, one has to make oneself lowly in one's own imagination as the children are (they do not have to make themselves lowly and do not make themselves so; they just are so). To "make oneself lowly" is the same as to "change and become like little children".

Mt. 18:5 starts a new idea (the pericope goes from 18:5-11): One must avoid giving scandal to children, i.e. to make them fall and sin because "their angels in heaven constantly behold the heavenly Father's face" (Mt. 18:10).

Great and greatest is therefore somebody who is little, little as children.

HOMILY

BECOME GREAT BY BEING SMALL

1. The Feast of the Santo Niño as feast proper to the Philippines is recent. But the origin goes back to the beginning of Christianity in our country. According to tradition the image of the Santo Niño was given to the native Queen Juana of Cebu as baptismal gift in April 1521, when she together with her husband, King Humabon and many others were baptized, the first bigger group in the Philippines. And ever since, the devotion to the Santo Niño is one of the most popular devotions in our country.

2. Douglas Elwood and Patricia Ling Magdamo write in their book *Christ in Philippine Context* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1971), p. 5: "The first thing that strikes us about the Filipino Christ — that is, the view of Christ most commonly held in the Philippines — is its similarity to the traditional Spanish Christ, and therefore also to the Latin American Christ. He appears almost exclusively in two dramatic roles: as the Santo Niño (Holy Child) or as the Santo Cristo and the Santo Entierro (Christ Interred) — the tragic Victim on the cross or in the tomb. As with the traditional Spanish image, it is almost as though Christ was born and died but never really lived. The great formative and decisive years of Jesus' life — the years between helpless infancy and his virile resolution to die in order that others may live — is strangely passed over. The only significant moments in his life that

have received sustained attention are his birth and his death. The Nativity scene is familiar, as is the Crucifixion, but Jesus Nazareno as an historical individual is virtually unknown or else disregarded." And on page 6 they continue: "Devotion to the Holy Child would not be harmful if it did not divert our attention from the adult Jesus who was the Master of men and the Leader of a non-violent revolution. Christ as the miracle working Infant seems never to grow to real manhood. But, clearly, the Christ Child is important to us only as we see him from the perspective of the Man of Nazareth at work in the carpenter shop; when we see him struggling, hungry and lonely, with the temptations of a strong man; when we see him announcing good news to the poor, calling laborers to his side, warning the rich, and denouncing hypocrites; when we see him laying down his life to set others free, and forgiving those who nailed him to the Cross."

3. This picture of Christ, seen mainly as Santo Niño and as Santo Entierro may be true for some or many people without further religious training. Surveys conducted at the University of San Carlos in 1973 showed that out of 80 respondents, four chose the Santo Entierro, six the Santo Niño, while 50 students selected Christ the Friend as the dominant figure. The respondents of this survey were students coming in the main from Catholic High Schools. In other words, people see the grown-up Christ.

4. Furthermore, the Sto. Niño is always presented as the ruler of the world with the insignia of a king or emperor and not as the little helpless babe in the manger. The Sto. Niño is celebrated as the Señor, not as a helpless child.

5. What, therefore, the Christians in the sixteenth century wanted to stress with the devotion of the Santo Niño and we want to do with them is the idea: Great are not the kings of the world, great is not somebody who lords it over other people. But great is Christ, who is king of kings, although he humbled himself and became a little child. We read in Phil. 2:6-11:

Though he was in the form of God,
he did not deem equality with God something to
be grasped at.

Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of
a slave, being born in the likeness of men . . . accept-
ing even death on the cross.

Because of this God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name... so that all proclaim: Jesus Christ is Lord.

6. His attitude must be also ours. We are great if we become children again. Only then we enter the kingdom of God (Mt. 18:3). Jn. 3:3 puts the same truth this way: "No one can see the reign of God, unless he is begotten again (*anōthen*). It is one of the rare texts where John uses the term "kingdom of God"; whereas Matthew uses that concept quite often. Thus many see in Jn. 3:3 a parallel to Mt. 18:3: Great is the man who is born again, born from above (the expression *anōthen* can mean "again" and "from above": we are born again by being born from above). Thus we become like little children by being born again, being born from above, by being baptised. Baptism alone makes a man great.

7. We are like a child, if we can say "Abba = Father" again as a child does. Every child of God has this prerogative, as St. Paul puts it in Gal. 4:6: "The proof that you are sons is the fact that God has sent forth into our hearts the spirit of his Son which cries out 'Abba!' ('Father!')." (Cf. Rom. 8:15).

8. Only old people are wise in the estimation of ancient nations, especially of the Jews. Children are stupid; they must shut up in the presence of the elders. When the Priestly Source pictures the wisdom of the first patriarchs from Adam till Noah, he pictures them as very wise, since we all descend from them. And that he does by making them very old, most of them more than 900 years (Gen. 5:1-32). The word of Christ "Unless you become like little children" would therefore mean: "In your own estimation you must consider yourselves as unimportant as children are held in public, especially in the presence of grown-ups."

9. Children do not humble themselves. They are little by birth, are aware of their littleness so that out of gratitude or fear for security they accept what those who are larger and stronger can give them. They trust and are open, and uncomplicated.

10. As grown-ups we have to be free of ambition, jealousy and a domineering attitude. We should be rather open, trustful, forgetting ourselves, spending our life at service and not at power, relying on God and trusting him completely.

11. Great is the man who can stoop down to a child: the mother who feeds the small baby, is one with the child, speaks his language and plays his games. Great is anybody who teaches a child.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (January 25, 1981)

The thirty-four Sundays which remain outside of the Christmas and Easter Cycles are called Sundays in Ordinary Time or Sundays throughout the Year. The Sundays of the Year begin properly with the Second Sunday, since the First Sunday is the feast of the Baptism of our Lord, and here in the Philippines only with the Third Sunday, since the Second Sunday is the Feast of the Sto. Niño. The first group of these Sundays ends with the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Lent and Eastertide then interrupt the series, which begins again after the Feast of the Blessed Trinity and continues until the thirty-fourth Sunday = the Solemnity of Christ the King, which is the Sunday before the First Sunday of Advent. The solemnities of Pentecost and the Blessed Trinity replace two Sundays of the Year, but leave the corresponding weekly readings, which follow them, intact.

The Lectionary arranges the Epistle and the Gospel texts for semi-continuous reading, to allow us to appreciate the contents of the books as clearly as possible. The Old Testament passages harmonize with the Gospel since they were chosen with the theme of the Gospel in mind. The Epistle usually is intended to be independent of the first reading and the Gospel. Similarities occur, but are coincidental. There is no attempt at continuity in the choice of books from the Old Testament.

St. Matthew's Gospel predominates in the Year One (A) almost exclusively. The early Sundays tell of our Lord's early preaching and ministry after his baptism.

Jesus started his preaching career in Galilee, in the Galilee of the Gentiles (gospel). Isaiah had already foretold that a great light would shine in these regions of Zebulon and Naphtali (first reading). With Christ's preaching around Capernaum this light is shining, and that it can go on shining Christ calls his first apostle (gospel), thus laying the foundation for the universal Church. The opposite of such universalism are factions and party spirit (second reading) as they existed in Corinth.

First Reading: Isaiah 8:23-9:3 (Hebrew and thus NAB)

This reading we saw already in the midnight mass of Christmas, with the exception of 8:23. In the context of Christmas the great light was shining with Christ's birth. In the context of today's Mass the preaching of Jesus in Galilee signals the great light which has come to the same regions of Zebulon and Nephtali which under the Assyrian king Tigleth-pileser III (745-727 B.C.) in 734 suffered so much, resulting into the deportation of the inhabitants to Assyria. Now these people shall be the first of all the Jews to see the great light of the Messiah when he starts preaching the good news.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 4:12-23

Taking together all the gospels, the following events seem likely: Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by the Baptist and baptized and preached for some time at the Jordan himself (Jn. 3:24). When the Baptist was thrown into prison Jesus went to Galilee (Mt. 4:12 par). Probably after he had been rejected in Nazareth (Lk. 4:16-30) he made Capernaum his headquarters and took his mother and brothers (cousins) along (Jn. 2:12). From there in case (of danger) one could easily go to Bethsaida, the territory of the friendly king Philip or to the Decapolis across the Sea of Tiberias. In Capernaum, where Peter also lived, probably in the house of his mother-and father-in-law, Jesus during his activity in Galilee stayed most of the time and made it "his own city" (Mt. 9:1).

In this preaching activity of Christ in Galilee, Matthew sees the prophecy of Isaiah 8:23-9:1 fulfilled: the regions of Zebulon and Nephtali deported first into exile are now the first to see the Messiah's light, are the first to hear the good news: Christ's light is always shining in his gospel.

The essence of the gospel is expressed in a short sentence: "Reform your lives! The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 4:17): *Metanoete* in Greek does not just mean "do penance", but implies a changing of thinking, a real reform of our life. Where so far we stood in the center of our thinking and planning, Christ must stand. And the reason is obvious: With Christ's preaching, the kingdom is at hand. For he inaugurates the kingdom; in a way we can even identify him with the kingdom.

That light, that kingdom must go on, must come to its climax: all men must accept it, must be brought into it. And

thus Christ starts establishing his Church by calling his four first apostles. Again, if we take all four gospels together, it seems that Christ called these first four apostles: Peter, Andrew, James and John already at the Jordan. They were disciples of the Baptist (Jn. 1:35-42). The Lord left them still some time and they may have gone fishing again. The final call came later, reported in Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20 and Lk. 5:1-11 (there in a different context again, i.e., after a miraculous draft of fish).

The two small pericopies, the call of Peter and Andrew (Mt. 4:18-2) and the call of James and John (Mt. 4:21-22) probably did not take place at the same time because fishing usually took place at night (thus the first pericope where Peter and Andrew are fishing), and the mending of the nets (second pericope with James and John) was done during the day. But Matthew, following Mark gives us a theology of Christ's call: When he calls, that call has irresistible power. All four leave everything: boat, net and father; and follow Christ without hesitation. It's a wholehearted decision for life.

Nobody is in the fullest sense prepared for a call. We have to learn all over again. Yet, there is a certain preparation: fishermen become fishers of men. It makes us think, why the Lord chose just them. But there are many qualities both have in common. (as we shall see).

HOMILY

FISHERMEN FROM GALILEE FISHERS OF MEN

1. Often when God calls somebody it looks like a mere chance. Yes, sometimes it even looks like a poor choice. But then, as times goes on, this poor choice turns out to be providential, one which hardly could have been better.

2. When Christ called his first apostles Peter and Andrew, casting their net into the sea, and then James and John, who were mending their nets (Mt. 4:18-22), most would have been very critical with this choice. Many would have said: these apostles would never have passed the qualifying exam of any modern vocational director. And yet, the Lord called them, not because he had no other choice, but because he wanted to call them.

3. Galilee belonged to the Northern Kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel. These northern tribes were much in favor of

a monarchy but preferred a loose confederacy of tribes. Galilee in particular was originally by Joshua assigned to the tribes of Asher, Naphtali and Zebulon (Jos. 9). They never succeeded in completely expelling the native Canaanite inhabitants. And thus there was always a mixed population in Galilee. This became even more outspoken after the exile. After all, during the long time of the exile (722 B.C. till 538 B.C.) of the Northern Kingdom the Assyrians made many strangers settle in Galilee; whereas in the Southern Kingdom the exile lasted only from 587 till 538 B.C. and thus the Jewish population remained more intact.

4. The Jews in Galilee had close contact with pagans, with non-Jews. This caused the Galileans to be open to other people and to new ideas. They were fond of innovations and changes. They were ready to follow a leader and to begin an insurrection, as there are reported several in history (cf. Lk. 13:4). They were quick in temper and given to quarelling. Yet they were the most chivalrous of men. Flavius Josephus testifies: "The Galileans have never been destitute of courage. Cowardice was never a characteristic of the Galileans. They were ever more anxious for honor than for gain." All these characteristics made them most fertile ground for a new gospel to be preached to them.

5. This openness to new ideas came from the fact that Galilee of the Gentiles was literally surrounded by Gentiles. On the west by the Phoenicians, to the north and east by the Syrians, to the south by the Samaritans. — Furthermore, the great roads of the world passed through Galilee. So the Way of the Sea coming from Damascus and going to Egypt and Africa. And the Road to the East led to Mesopotamia through Galilee.

6. The apostles to be were fishermen. The Pharisees would not have taken them as disciples; after all, their profession made them unable to observe the Mosaic Law in all details; they were often levitically unclean. They did not know the law either. Often enough later on they would be blamed by the leaders of Israel for not washing their hands before certain functions (Mt. 15:2) and for trespassing the traditions of the ancestors (Mt. 15:2). Jesus saw deeper as he also saw in the Galileans as a whole their openness more than their possible wrong contact with pagans. After all, he had been sent to the poor (Lk. 4:18 = Is. 61:1).

7. A disciple of a scribe or a Pharisee would chose his master and follow him till he finally learned from him the Mosaic Law and soon was able to explain this law himself and

thus became an independent master. With Christ it was different. He called his disciples. Nobody was choosing Jesus himself. "It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit" (Jn. 15:16) the Lord told them at the Last Supper. And this call was free and undeserved; a great grace. The disciple of Christ would remain a disciple all his life. He would never reach or bypass the Lord. He would never become a master. "Avoid the title 'master'. Only one is your master (Mt. 23:10)." A disciple is called to be with the master all his life, to be molded by him, to be close to him, to learn from him. Jesus believed and knew that these fishermen from the Galilee of the Gentiles could be such disciples.

8. That call of the Lord had power, irresistible power. The fishermen left everything dear to them: nets and boat, father and fellow workers. It was a word of creation, of new creation. As in the beginning God only had to speak a word and there was the light (Gen. 1:3), the firmament (Gen. 1:6), the water and the dry land (Gen. 1:9), the sun, the moon and the stars (Gen. 1:14-15), the fish and the other creatures (Gen. 1:20-21), so now with one word he calls his disciples into existence. And they follow him without hesitation, wholeheartedly and resolutely.

9. Fishers and fishers of men: Is this only a play on words, was this choice only chance, or do both professions have something in common? The Lord knew that they have much in common:

a. Fishers and fishers of men must *work on a team*. For fishing there were three different methods: (1) fishing by a line, (2) fishing with a casting net: i.e., a net weighted with stones around the outside which, when thrown out into the water, is drawn together at the bottom and thus encloses the fish as in a pouch. (3) fishing with a drag net, i.e. a net was cast into the water from two boats with ropes at each of the four corners and weighted with stones. When the boats were rowed along with the net behind them, it became a great cone in which the fishes were caught. The last two methods, the most often used, required a lot of teamwork. — Many great things in the vocation of an apostle can be done only on a team too.

b. To fish and to preach the word of God is *hard work* which requires *patience* and *perseverance*. If one does not succeed in one particular day or night, one has to try another time. One must never give up, never despair. The success will

come, sooner or later. One can not determine the time when the fish will bite. One cannot force hearers to be appreciative. It comes in God's time and season.

c. It takes a lot of *courage* to fish. Storms may come up. After all, the boat is so small and the sea so large, so powerful, so unpredictable. — How can a preacher be sure that people will appreciate what he is going to say? Will they take the truth? Will they ridicule him? Will they call him old-fashioned?

d. A fisher must keep himself *out of sight*, otherwise the fish will not bite. A preacher must deliver Christ's message, not his own.

10. Fishers from the Galilee of the Gentiles were called to be fishermen. Apparently a poor choice of unqualified unprofessionals. Galilee the place of second class Jews for those living in the capital of Jerusalem; people who did not observe the Law of Moses for the scribes and Pharisees. But for the Lord who looked at the heart they were open-minded people, ready to follow wholeheartedly with a sense of determination, gratefulness, hard work and teamwork.