

## DECEMBER 25, 2017 - THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS) - AT THE VIGIL MASS

Reading 1 [IS 62:1-5](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29](#)

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R. (2a) **For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

Reading 2 [ACTS 13:16-17, 22-25](#)

Gospel [MT 1:1-25](#)

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The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile. After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born **Jesus who is called the Christ**. Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Christ, fourteen generations.

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill

what the Lord had said through the prophet: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel*, which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

### HOMILY:

I'll admit that I am not much of a Christmas shopper. Part of it is probably due to the fact that I don't usually get to see my family until well after Christmas. Part of it is that I try to hold off my Christmas celebrations until Christmas comes, to have a good advent preparation for the celebration of the birth of our Lord at Christmas, instead of beginning Christmas activities sometime after Labor Day. Part of it is that I get a bit anxious about shopping—I'm definitely not good at it and almost always out of my element! What follows is a story of my attempt to overcome my fears—going big, going to Walmart.

It was the parish's Adopt-a-Family process that pushed me out of my comfort zone and into that maelstrom of shopping, Walmart, in search of men's socks (size 15) and women's winter gloves and hats. While it may seem obvious, while I was searching for the prescribed items (where I discovered, to my amazement, that there actually are easily available size 15 socks!), it struck me that there was a great deal of searching going on all around me. For, unlike my mission, clearly defined by the tag off our adopt-a-family trees, quite a bit of shopping that I witnessed was very much experimental, searching for an unknown "something" that might be the perfect expression of affection and love that, at the same time, might meet a need in the recipient. One man I met definitely displayed this experimental version of shopping!

While searching for the women's gloves, I had definitely entered a world in which I was solely unexperienced. My mission, as I defined it, was to make a quick raid into the heart of womenswear, find the gloves, make a quick selection (what did I know?), and beat a quick escape towards the men's socks. Apparently, my decisiveness was inspiring to a rather exasperated man who too was out of his comfort zone, who held up a pair of boots and said, "Do you think your wife would like these?" Not prepared to get into a discussion about priestly celibacy, I replied, "I don't think so." He did not find my lack of enthusiasm helpful (it was not meant to be!) and it had the desired effect of changing his line of questioning. He sighed and said, "Okay . . . I'll keep searching." Surprise! In the midst of the Walmart womenswear section, the great meaning of Christmas was uttered: "**I'll keep searching**": the most important truth of this Christmas or any Christmas!

This story in particular in this season had me thinking about all the searching that's been going on before Christmas, but not, perhaps, in the way one might first think. For while there has been much searching across the Internet and across the store shelves for that perfect gift to express one's love, affection, and support of a loved one; or to fulfill an obligation as part of an office gift exchange; or just to cover the bases in the family; I'd like to focus on a much longer history of searching, among which our Christmas searching finally makes sense.

Tonight's gospel reading, at first glimpse a long list of ancestors from Abraham to Joseph, the spouse of Mary, is about much more than fathers and sons. The gospel writer Matthew begins his gospel, and this genealogy, with these words: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." In this, we see the purpose of its inclusion in the gospels: that Jesus Christ (Greek for Messiah) is the long sought and awaited fulfillment of promises to Abraham (to make his people a great nation) and King David (to set a descendent on his throne forever). See, therefore, this genealogy as a scanning search across time, from the time of Abraham and David, searching for the Messiah, the eternal and anointed inbreaking of God's care and mercy for His people, where God said He could be found—amid the chosen people Israel. See this list of ancestors then in this manner: a searching for the Messiah, across generations of names now largely unknown to us. The search for the Messiah goes like this: Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob (is it Jacob?) . . . Jehoshaphat? Joram? Uzziah? Is it Mannassah? Shealtiel? Eliud? Eleazar? Matthan? All the way, all the searching way, generations through generations, down to the end: Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called **the Christ**. Finally, it is Jesus, the Christ, literally the anointed One, the Messiah, where the searching of each human heart ends.

In the midst of this searching season, epitomized by the man who I met in the Walmart, each of us, by our very creation, have a searching heart, that will not find complete satisfaction until we find the One who created us as searchers . . . or more accurately, until we are found by the God who has come all the way from heaven to Bethlehem to find us, right in the heart of our humanity. Christmas, above all, is the celebration that the searching is over. True, our search for gifts with which to express our love and affection of others, is over (except for exchanges and gift card redemption!), but what is not over, nor will it be, is the quest of our searching hearts for the One who created us—and, more importantly, the search of God for us in Christ. For when all the gifts are opened, all the gatherings are complete, and travels take us back home, the searching hearts we still have is normal. They reveal that our perpetual dissatisfaction cannot be filled with anything in this world, except our God with us, who draws particularly close to us in the Eucharist we are about to share, the very same Body and Blood of Christ that first came to earth in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Christmas is indeed about searching: our searching for God and, more importantly, through all ages, God searching for us and finding us, definitively and finally, in Jesus Christ, the anointed and long expected savior of the nations. And the good news is this: despite our wanderings and distractions, the words of that prophetic man in the Walmart are the most important words of all our lives, the Christmas message, but not words of a shopper, but words of God speaking to each of our searching hearts: "I'll keep searching" . . . searching for you, each of you, all the way from heaven, to Bethlehem, and to your hearts, until you discover the deepest truth of your searching heart: Jesus Christ, in his mercy, is searching for you.