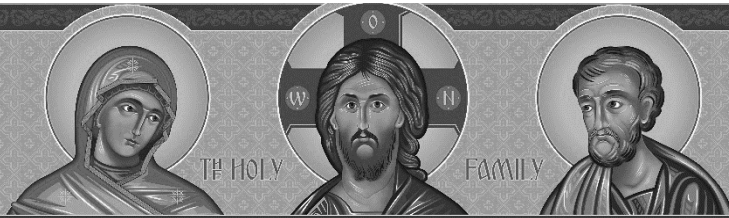


*Holy  
Family*



*Catholic  
Parish*

## 4th Sunday of Advent

YEAR B

24<sup>th</sup> December 2023

### FIRST READING : 2 Samuel 7:1-5,8-12,14,16 ·

Once David had settled into his house and the Lord had given him rest from all the enemies surrounding him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'Look, I am living in a house of cedar while the ark of God dwells in a tent.' Nathan said to the king, 'Go and do all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with you.' But that very night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: 'Go and tell my servant David, "Thus the Lord speaks: Are you the man to build me a house to dwell in? I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be leader of my people Israel; I have been with you on all your expeditions; I have cut off all your enemies before you. I will give you fame as great as the fame of the greatest on earth. I will provide a place for my people Israel; I will plant them there and they shall dwell in that place and never be disturbed again; nor shall the wicked continue to oppress them as they did, in the days when I appointed judges over my people Israel; I will give them rest from all their enemies. The Lord will make you great; the Lord will make you a House. And when your days are ended and you are laid to rest with your ancestors, I will preserve the offspring of your body after you and make his sovereignty secure. I will be a father to him and he a son to me; if he does evil, I will punish him with the rod such as men use, with strokes such as mankind gives. Your House and your sovereignty will always stand secure before me and your throne be established for ever."

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM : Psalm 88(89):2-5,27,29;



℟ For—e—ver I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

*I will sing forever of your love O Lord, through all ages my mouth shall pro-claim your truth. Of this I am sure: that your love lasts forever, that your truth is firmly established as the heavens.* ℟

*"I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your dynasty for ever and set up your throne for all ages".* ℟

*He will say to me: "You are my father, my God, the rock who saves me." I will keep my love for him always; for him my covenant shall endure".* ℟

### SECOND READING : Romans 16:25-27

Glory to him who is able to give you the strength to live according to the Good News I preach, and in which I proclaim Jesus Christ, the revelation of a mystery kept secret for endless ages, but now so clear that it must be broadcast to pagans everywhere to bring them to the obedience of faith. This is only what scripture has predicted, and it is all part of the way the eternal God wants things to be. He alone is wisdom; give glory therefore to him through Jesus Christ for ever and ever. Amen.

### GOSPEL : Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

### Christmas Mass Schedule

#### TONIGHT

**CHRISTMAS EVE, SUNDAY, DEC 24<sup>TH</sup>**

**10pm: Carols Service**

**11pm: Midnight Mass**

#### TOMORROW

**CHRISTMAS, MONDAY, DEC 25<sup>TH</sup>**

**8am: Latin Mass**

**10am: English Mass**

# CHRIST WAS REALLY BORN ON DECEMBER 25: HERE'S A DEFENCE OF THE TRADITIONAL DATE FOR CHRISTMAS

by Dr Taylor Marshall

The Catholic Church, from at least the second century, has claimed that Christ was born on December 25. However, today, it is commonly alleged that our Lord Jesus Christ was not born on December 25. For the sake of simplicity, let us set out the usual objections to the date of December 25 and counter each of them.

**OBJECTION 1:** December 25 was chosen in order to replace the pagan Roman festival of 'Saturnalia'. Saturnalia was a popular winter festival and so the Catholic Church prudently substituted Christmas in its place.

**REPLY TO OBJECTION 1:** Saturnalia commemorated the winter solstice. Yet the winter solstice falls on December 22. It is true that Saturnalia celebrations began as early as December 17 and extended till December 23. Still, the dates don't match up.

**OBJECTION 2:** December 25 was chosen to replace the pagan Roman holiday *Natalis Solis Invicti* which means "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun."

**REPLY TO OBJECTION 2:** Let us examine first the cult of the 'Unconquered Sun'. The Roman Emperor Aurelian introduced the cult of the *Sol Invictus* or *Unconquered Sun* to Rome in A.D. 274. Aurelian found political traction with this cult, because his own name *Aurelian* derives from the Latin word *aurora* denoting "sunrise." Coins reveal that Emperor Aurelian called himself the *Pontifex Solis* or *Pontiff of the Sun*. Thus, Aurelian simply accommodated a generic solar cult and identified his name with it at the end of the third century.

Most importantly, there is no historical record for a celebration *Natalis Sol Invictus* on December 25 prior to A.D. 354. Within an illuminated manuscript for the year A.D. 354, there is an entry for December 25 reading "N INVICTI CM XXX."

Here N means "nativity." INVICTI means "of the Unconquered." CM signifies "circenses missus" or "games ordered." The Roman numeral XXX equals thirty.

Thus, the inscription means that thirty games were order for the nativity of the Unconquered for December 25th. Note that the word "sun" is not present. Moreover, the very same codex also lists "natus Christus in Betleem Iudeae" for the day of December 25. The phrase is translated as "birth of Christ in Bethlehem of Judea."

The date of December 25th only officially became the "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun" under the Emperor Julian the Apostate (born 331; reigned 361-363). Julian the Apostate had been a Christian but who had apostatized and returned to Roman paganism. History reveals that it was the hateful former Christian Emperor that erected a pagan holiday on December 25. Think about that for a moment. What was he trying to replace?

These historical facts reveal that the *Unconquered Sun* was not likely a popular deity in the Roman Empire. The Roman people did not need to be weaned off of a so-called ancient holiday. Moreover, the tradition of a December 25th celebration does not find a place on the Roman calendar *until after the Christianization of Rome*. The "*Birthday of the Unconquered Sun*" holiday was scarcely traditional and hardly popular. Saturnalia (mentioned above) was much more popular, traditional, and fun. It seems, rather, that Julian the Apostate had attempted to introduce a pagan holiday in order to replace the Christian one!

**OBJECTION 3:** Christ could not have been born in December since Saint Luke describes shepherds herding in the neighbouring fields of Bethlehem.

Shepherds do not herd during the winter. Thus, Christ was not born in winter.

**REPLY TO OBJECTION 3:** Recall that Palestine is not England, Russia, or Alaska. Bethlehem is situated at the latitude of 31.7°.

My city of Dallas, Texas has the latitude of 32.8°, and it's still rather comfortable outside in December.

As the great Cornelius-a-Lapide remarks during his lifetime, one could still see shepherds and sheep in the fields of Italy during late December, and Italy is at higher latitude than Bethlehem.

Now we move on to establishing the birthday of Christ from Sacred Scripture in two steps. The first step is to use Scripture to determine the birthday of Saint John the Baptist. The next step is using Saint John the Baptist's birthday as the key for finding Christ's birthday. We can discover that Christ was born in late December by observing first the time of year in which Saint Luke describes Saint Zacharias in the temple.

This provides us with the approximate conception date of Saint John the Baptist. From there we can follow the chronology that Saint Luke gives, and that lands us at the end of December.

Saint Luke reports that Zacharias served in the "course of Abias" (Lk 1:5) which Scripture records as the eighth course among the twenty-four priestly courses (Neh 12:17). Each shift of priests served one week in the temple for two times each year. The course of Abias served during the eighth week and the thirty-second week in the annual cycle. However, when did the cycle of courses begin?

Josef Heinrich Friedlieb has convincingly established that the first priestly course of Jojarib was on duty during the destruction of Jerusalem on the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av.

Thus the priestly course of Jojarib was on duty during the second week of Av. Consequently, the priestly course of Abias (the course of Saint Zacharias) was undoubtedly serving during the second week of the Jewish month of Tishri—the very week of the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of Tishri. In our calendar, the Day of Atonement would land anywhere from September 22 to October 8.

Zacharias and Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist immediately after Zacharias served his course. This entails that Saint John the Baptist would have been conceived somewhere around the end of September, placing John's birth at the end of June, confirming the Catholic Church's celebration of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist on June 24.

The second-century *Protoevangelium of Saint James* also confirms a late September conception of the Baptist since the work depicts Saint Zacharias as High Priest and as entering the Holy of Holies—not merely the holy place with the altar of incense. This is a factual mistake because Zacharias was not the high priest, but one of the chief priests.

Still, the *Protoevangelium* regards Zacharias as a high priest and this associates him with the Day of Atonement, which lands on the tenth day of the Hebrew month of Tishri (roughly the end of our September). Immediately after this entry into the temple and message of the Archangel Gabriel, Zacharias and Elizabeth conceive John the Baptist. Allowing for forty weeks of gestation, this places the birth of John the Baptist at the end of June—once again confirming the Catholic date for the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist on June 24.

The rest of the dating is rather simple. We read that just after the Virgin Mary conceived Christ, she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was six months pregnant with John the Baptist. This means that John the Baptist was six months older than our Lord Jesus Christ (Lk 1:24-27, 36). If you add six months to June 24 you get December 24-25 as the birthday of Christ.

Then, if you subtract nine months from December 25 you get that the Annunciation was March 25, which is when it is celebrated in our liturgical calendar. All the dates match up perfectly. So then, if John the Baptist was conceived shortly after the Jewish Day of the Atonement, then the traditional Catholic dates are essentially correct. The birth of Christ would be about or on December 25.

Sacred Tradition also confirms December 25 as the birthday of the Son of God. The source of this ancient tradition is the Blessed Virgin Mary herself. Ask any mother about the birth of her children. She will not only give you the date of the birth, but she will be able to rattle off the time, the location, the weather, the weight of the baby, the length of the baby, and a number of other details. I'm the father of six blessed children, and while I sometimes forget these details—*mea maxima culpa*—my wife never does. You see, mothers never forget the details surrounding the births of their babies.

Now ask yourself: Would the Blessed Virgin Mary ever forget the birth of her Son Jesus Christ who was conceived without human seed, proclaimed by angels, born in a miraculous way, and visited by Magi? She knew from the moment of His incarnation in her stainless womb that He was the Son of God and Messiah. Would she ever forget that day?

Next, ask yourself: Would the Apostles be interested in hearing Mary tell the story? Of course they would. Do you think the holy Apostle who wrote, "And the Word was made flesh," (John) was not interested in the minute details of His birth? Even when I walk around with our seven-month-old son, people always ask "How old is he?" or "When was he born?" Don't you think people asked this question of Mary?

So the exact birth date (December 25) and the time (midnight) would have been known in the first century, and by many early Christians. Moreover, the Apostles would have asked about it and would have, no doubt, commemorated the blessed event that both Saint Matthew and Saint Luke chronicle for us.

St Luke records the Infancy Narratives in his Gospel. He would have spoken directly to Mary regarding those details. He would have visited her. In summary, it is completely reasonable to state that the early Christians both knew and commemorated the birth of Christ. Their source would have been His Immaculate Mother.

Further testimony reveals that the Church Fathers claimed December 25 as the Birthday of Christ *prior* to the conversion of Constantine and the Roman Empire. The earliest record of this is that Pope Saint Telesphorus (reigned A.D. 126-137) instituted the tradition of Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve.

Although the *Liber Pontificalis* (an early book of liturgical prayers) does not give us the date of Christmas, it assumes that the Pope was already celebrating Christmas and that a Mass at midnight was added.

During this time, we also read the following words of Theophilus (A.D. 115-181), Catholic bishop of Caesarea in Palestine: "We ought to celebrate the birthday of Our Lord on what day soever the 25th of December shall happen."

Shortly thereafter in the second century, Saint Hippolytus (A.D. 170-240) wrote in passing that the birth of Christ occurred on December 25:

*"The First Advent of our Lord in the flesh occurred when He was born in Bethlehem, was December 25th, a Wednesday, while Augustus was in his forty-second year, which is five thousand and five hundred years from Adam. He suffered in the thirty-third year, March 25th, Friday, the eighteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, while Rufus and Roubellion were Consuls."*

Also note in the quote above the special significance of March 25, which marks the death of Christ (March 25 was assumed to corresponded to the Hebrew month Nisan 14 – the traditional

date of crucifixion).

Christ, as the perfect man, was believed to have been conceived and died on the same day—March 25. In his *Chronicon*, Saint Hippolytus states that the earth was created on March 25, 5500 B.C. Thus, March 25 was identified by the Church Fathers as the Creation date of the universe, as the date of the Annunciation and Incarnation of Christ, and also as the date of the Death of Christ our Savior.

In the Syrian Church, March 25 or the Feast of the Annunciation was seen as one of the most important feasts of the entire year. It denoted the day that God took up his abode in the womb of the Virgin.

In fact, if the Annunciation and Good Friday came into conflict on the calendar, the Annunciation trumped it, so important was the day in Syrian tradition. It goes without saying that the Syrian Church preserved some of the most ancient Christian traditions and had a sweet and profound devotion for Mary and the Incarnation of Christ.

Now then, March 25 was enshrined in the early Christian tradition, and from this date it is easy to discern the date of Christ's birth. March 25 (Christ conceived by the Holy Ghost) plus nine months brings us to December 25 (the birth of Christ at Bethlehem).

Saint Augustine confirms this tradition of March 25 as the Messianic conception and December 25 as His birth:

*"For Christ is believed to have been conceived on the 25th of March, upon which day also he suffered; so the womb of the Virgin, in which he was conceived, where no one of mortals was begotten, corresponds to the new grave in which he was buried, wherein was never man laid, neither before him nor since. But he was born, according to tradition, upon December the 25th."*

In about A.D. 400, Saint Augustine also noted how the schismatic Donatists celebrated December 25 as the birth of Christ, but that the schismatics refused to celebrate Epiphany on January 6, since they regarded Epiphany as a new feast without a basis in Apostolic Tradition.

The Donatist schism originated in A.D. 311 which may indicate that the Latin Church was celebrating a December 25 Christmas (but not a January 6 Epiphany) before A.D. 311.

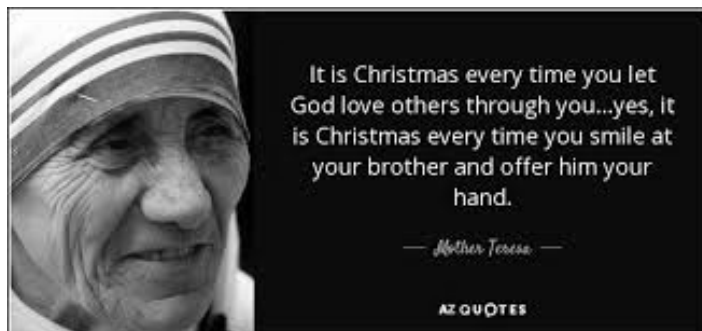
Whichever is the case, the liturgical celebration of Christ's birth was commemorated in Rome on December 25 long before Christianity became legalized and long before our earliest record of a pagan feast for the birthday of the Unconquered Sun.

For these reasons, it is reasonable and right to hold that Christ was born on December 25 in 1 B.C. and that he died and rose again in March of A.D. 33.

Taylor's new book *The Eternal City* also makes an argument in defence of the traditional BC/AD dating as being 100% accurate.

This article is located at:

<https://taylormarshall.com/2012/12/yes-christ-was-really-born-on-december.html>



**PROCESSIONAL HYMN:**

O Come, O come, Emmanuel  
 Redeem thy captive Israel,  
 That doth in exile homeless mourn  
 Until her Saviour Christ be born.

*Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel.  
 Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come thou day star seen on high  
 with healing for our hearts draw nigh:  
 Do thou the mists of night dispel and  
 death's forboding darkness quell.

O come of Gentile hearts, the King.  
 A world that needs thee ransoming  
 And save thy Servants who confess  
 with humbled hearts their faithlessness.

**OFFERTORY CHANT:**

*Hail Mary, full of grace, \*  
 The Lord is with thee.*

*Blessed art thou amongst wo-men, and  
 blessed is the fruit of thy womb.*

*But Mary said to the angel, \*  
 "How can this be, since I have no relations  
 with a man?"*

*And the angel said to her in reply, †  
 "The holy Spirit will come upon you, \*  
 And the power of the Most High will  
 overshadow you.  
 Therefore the child to be born will be  
 called holy, the son of God.*

*And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, \*  
 Has also conceived a son in her old age,  
 And this is the sixth month for her who  
 was called barren; \* for nothing will be  
 impossible for God."*

*Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of  
 the Lord. \**

*May it be done to me according to your  
 word."*

**COMMUNION HYMN:**

*Sicut cervus desiderat  
 ad fontes aquarum ita desiderat,  
 anima mea ad te Deus.*

*As the deer longs for running water,  
 So longs my soul for Thee. Lord.*

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,  
 And with fear and trembling stand;  
 Ponder nothing earthly minded,  
 For with blessing in His hand,  
 Christ our God to earth descendeth,  
 Our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,  
 As of old on earth He stood,  
 Lord of lords, in human vesture,  
 In the body and the blood;  
 He will give to all the faithful  
 His own self for heavenly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven  
 Spreads its vanguard on the way,  
 As the Light of light descendeth  
 From the realms of endless day,  
 That the powers of hell may vanish

That the powers of hell may vanish  
 As the darkness clears away.

At His feet the six winged Seraph,  
 Cherubim with sleepless eyes.  
 Veil their faces to the presence,  
 and with ceaseless voice they cry:  
 "Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia Lord,  
 most High.

*Alma Redemptoris Mater, quae pervia caeli  
 porta manes et stella maris, succurre  
 candenti, surgere qui curat populo:  
 Tu quae genuisti, na tura miran te, tuum  
 Sanctum genitorem: Virgo prius  
 ac posterius, Gabrielis abore.  
 Sumen illud ave, peccatorum miserere.*

**RECESSIONAL HYMN:**

Come, thou long expected Jesus,  
 Born to set thy people free;  
 From our fears and sins release us,  
 Let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,  
 hope of all the earth thou art:  
 Dear desire of ev'ry nation,  
 joy of ev'ry longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,  
 Born a child, and yet a king,  
 Born to reign in us forever,  
 Now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit  
 Rule in all our hearts alone;  
 By thine all sufficient merit  
 Raise us to thy glorious throne.

**FAMILY PRAYERS FOR ADVENT  
 WREATH****What to do?**

1. Begin with the Sign of the Cross
2. Light Candle
3. Say Antiphon of the Day
4. Say the Advent Prayer of that week
5. say Gospel of the Week
6. Finish with Grace before Meals.

**4th Week Prayer:** Stir up your  
 might, we pray You O Lord, and  
 come; rescue us through Your great  
 strength so that salvation, which has  
 been hindered by our sins, may be  
 hastened by the grace of Your gentle  
 mercy. Who lives and reigns forever  
 and ever. Amen.

**4th Week Gospel: Luke 1:39-45**

*"Blessed are you who believed that  
 what was spoken to you by the Lord  
 would be fulfilled."*

**Sacramental Programme 2024**

starts 24<sup>th</sup> February, 4 to 5pm in  
 the St Joseph Centre. Please  
 register your children with the  
 Parish Office on 834 6677 or  
 hfparish@xtra.co.nz

**NEXT SUNDAY:****31st December 2023****Holy Family**

*Gen 15:1-6, 21:1-3; Heb 11:8, 11-12, 17-19;  
 Lk 2:22-40;*

**LITURGY ROSTER****Night Mass –****24<sup>th</sup> December 2023****Readers:** E. O'Brien, L. Ahio**Prayers of the Faithful:** C. Tagiilima**Offertory:** L & S Ahio Family**Special Ministers:** P. Capundag**Christmas Day Mass –****25<sup>th</sup> December 2023****Readers:** R. Cardoza, M. D'Souza**Prayers of the Faithful:** B. Molloy**Offertory:** Cardoza Family**Special Ministers:** S. Molloy**Holy Family –****31<sup>st</sup> December 2023****Readers:** M. D'Souza, J. Brodie**Prayers of the Faithful:** E. Shaw**Offertory:** Thotawattage Family**Special Ministers:** P. Tagiilima**CHURCH CLEANING ROSTER**On a break till 10<sup>th</sup> Feb 2024*Please keep the church tidy.***SUNDAY CUP OF TEA ROSTER**On a break till 28<sup>th</sup> Jan 2024**ANNIVERSARIES THIS WEEK****25 Dec:** Gloria Petica**26 Dec:** Derek Nicholson**PARISH FINANCES**

<b>Parish</b>	\$2,240.73
<b>Priests</b>	\$1,120.37
<b>Total Cash and AP's</b>	\$3,361.10

**Holy Family Notices**

**Please note:** The Parish Office is  
 Closed till the 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan.

Fr Jeremy will be away at Hearts  
 Aflame from the 29<sup>th</sup> Dec to 9<sup>th</sup> Jan.  
*If you have an emergency and need a  
 Priest, please contact Holy Cross  
 Parish, Henderson on 0225606522 or  
 St Paul's Parish Massey on on  
 098337420.*

**Changes to Mass times from 26<sup>th</sup>  
 December to 9<sup>th</sup> January** are posted  
 in the foyer and on the noticeboard.

**Just a reminder:** Parish activities  
 that take a break during January.  
**Sunday Cup of Tea** – starts 28<sup>th</sup> Jan  
**Catechism Classes** – starts 28<sup>th</sup> Jan  
**Rosary for Life** – starts 28<sup>th</sup> Jan  
**Parish Newsletter** – starts 28<sup>th</sup> Jan  
**Monthly Rosary** – starts 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb  
**Church Cleaners** – start 10<sup>th</sup> Feb