

BIBLICAL RESOURCES

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16; Psalm 89 [88]; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

The child to be born will be holy and he will be called Son of God

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel said to her, "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 holy; he will be called Son of God. 36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The Annunciation to Mary is unique to Luke's gospel. Three of the Gospels enjoy a kind of prologue, Luke 1-2, Mt 1-2 and John 1. All three are explorations of the Christ event, in an attempt to bring out a deeper understanding of "what happened" for humanity in the incarnation.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

First of all, the story belongs to a type of

story familiar elsewhere in the Bible—Ishmael, Isaac, Samson, John the Baptist and even Jesus again in Matthew are all born as a result of a special intervention from on high. The pattern of these tales is noticed below. Whenever you have a pattern like this, the thing to look out for is how the pattern is being used in this concrete instance—where is it predictable and familiar? Where is it new and different?

KIND OF WRITING

Annunciation

An annunciation patterned type-scene following a predictable sequence. The basis pattern is well-recognised:

1. Appearance of an angel
2. Fear / prostration
3. Message
4. Objection
5. Sign

The Future of Accomplishments of the Child

2Sam 7:9, 13-14, 16. Cf. also Ps 2:7 and 89:29; Is 11:1-2; 4:2-3; 2Sam 7:14

The Portrait of Mary

Compare Mk 3:20-21 with Luke 11:14-16; and Mk 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21.

Compare Mk 6:4 and Luke 4:24. Mary is a figure of faith in the light of Abraham.

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

We explore within Luke-Acts echoes of themes enunciated here. The abundant (!) references illustrate the richness.

The *joy of salvation* is a large theme in Luke-Acts (Luke 1:14, 28; 2:10; 6:23; 8:13; 10:17, 20; 13:17; 15:5, 7, 10, 32; 19:6, 37; 22:5; 23:8; 24:41, 52; Acts 5:41; 8:8, 39; 11:23; 12:14; 13:48, 52; 15:3, 23, 31; 23:26).

Grace and being graced (Luke 1:28, 30; 2:40, 52; 4:22; 6:32-34; 17:9; Acts 2:47; 4:33;

Thought for the day

The season of preparation is drawing to a close. Like Mary, our getting ready involves deep listening to what God is asking of me *now* and an interior willingness to say "let what you have said be done to me." What is God asking of me now, as a person, in the family, at work, and indeed within the faith community of the Church? Have I noticed a pattern of "nudges" from God calling me to a deeper, perhaps different engagement as a disciple? Are my gifts—tokens of God's grace—fully at the service of my neighbour?

Prayer

Great and loving God, open my ear to your word, open my heart to your call, open my life to your service. Give us all the strength to live according to the Good News of your Son, Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

6:8; 7:10, 46; 11:23; 13:43; 14:3, 26; 15:11, 40; 18:27; 20:24, 32; 24:27; 25:3, 9).

David is frequently evoked (Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4, 11; 3:31; 6:3; 18:38-39; 20:41-42, 44; Acts 1:16; 2:25, 29, 34; 4:25; 7:45; 13:22, 34, 36; 15:16

Jacob too is recalled in the gospel and Acts (Luke 1:33; 3:34; 13:28; 20:37; Acts 3:13; 7:8, 12, 14-15, 32, 46).

Do not be afraid (Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; 5:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32; Acts 18:9; 27:24)

The *Holy Spirit* has a vast presence in Luke-Acts (Luke 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25-26; 3:16, 22; 4:1; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12; Acts 1:2, 5, 8, 16; 2:4, 33, 38; 4:8, 25, 31; 5:3, 32; 6:5; 7:51, 55; 8:15, 17, 19; 9:17, 31; 10:38, 44-45, 47; 11:15-16, 24; 13:2, 4, 9, 52; 15:8, 28; 16:6; 19:2, 6; 20:23, 28; 21:11; 28:25).

Servant—male or female—is an important image across Luke-Acts (Luke 1:38, 48 [from the Magnificat]; 2:29; 7:2-3, 8, 10; 12:37, 43, 45-47; 14:17, 21-23; 15:22; 17:7, 9-10; 19:13, 15, 17, 22; 20:10-11; 22:50; Acts 2:18; 4:29; 16:17).

ST PAUL

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-7)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 26 The sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy, as noted later. Gabriel describes himself earlier: *The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news."* (Luke 1:19) The Book of Jubilees 16:12 (a non-canonical text) tells us that it was in the *sixth month* of the year that Sarah became pregnant.

Verse 27 Virginitly was considered an unfulfilled and unfortunate state. Joseph makes an echo with the Joseph of Genesis. It is important for early Christians that Jesus is of the house of David—this is found not only in the gospels but also in Paul—Rom 1:3. The name "Mary" from the Hebrew Miriam means rebellion. This name has significance when you read the Magnificat politically.

Verse 28 Literally, it would be a verb, "graced."

Verse 29 This marks the third stage of the type-scene, that of fear and puzzlement.

Verse 30 Also a standard part of the formula. Many, many people in the Bible are told "not to be afraid": Gen 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; 35:17; 43:23; 46:3; 50:19; Ex 14:13; 20:20; Num 21:34; Deut 7:18 etc. All of this echoes Isa

7:14.

Verse 31 This is in absolute contrast to what was said, in Luke 1, of John the Baptist. The early Christians were keen to express continuity with the Israelite/Jewish past, as a mark of God's continued faithfulness.

Verse 32 This is the message—the language is interesting: royal in three senses: sonship, descendant of David, kingdom. The last line of v. 33 has found its way into the Creed.

Verse 33 This is a strange objection, because we all know how babies are born. Objections elsewhere in these stories are advanced age and infertility. In a way, the birth of John the Baptist is really patterned on the OT annunciations, while the birth of Jesus (here) is something extraordinarily new, signalled by the virginal conception.

Verse 34 The Holy Spirit, who inaugurates the new age—in Pentecost, in Jesus' first sermon, and first of all in his birth. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13)

Verse 35 The proof is offered practically (Elizabeth) and theologically (God). Notice the joining of the two causes of Elizabeth's childlessness: too old and, in any, case infertile.

Verse 36 The creator's actions are inscrutable.

Verse 37 This echoes God's challenge in Genesis 18:14: Can anything said by God be impossible?

Verse 38 On "here I am", see Gen 22:1; 46:2; Ex 3:4; 1Sam 3:4-16; Ps 40:7; Is 6:8. At this point, Mary is the exemplary "hearer of the word."

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. "Greetings, favoured one. The Lord is with you". We are all favoured ones and God is with us. Sometimes we are more aware of this than others. How have you experienced being a favoured person,

one blessed by God? How have you experienced God's presence? Who has been Gabriel to you a messenger of good news?

2. "Do not be afraid." Mary was perplexed by the words of the angel. Perhaps you too have sometimes been perplexed by life's path and wondered what it all meant. Perhaps at times you have doubted if God was really with you. In your troubled moments who has been an 'angel' helping to lower your anxiety?

3. The angel told Mary that it was through her fruitfulness that she would realise the truth of the greeting. New life would come into being through her, and it would be through the Spirit of God working in her. How and where have you experienced yourself as a source of life for others? Have you at times had the sense that the Spirit of God was at work in you?

4. Mary was taken by surprise by the invitation, but she did not tell the angel she was not ready, nor ask him to return later. She was prepared to go with the invitation even though it was not the "right moment." "Here I am Lord." What invitations have come to you at the "wrong time" and how have you responded.

5. Mary's response serves as a model for us—as one saying "yes" to what life offers. What is it like for you to say "yes" to life? Perhaps at this moment in your life you are being invited to say "Here I am, Lord"?

PRAYER

Here in our midst, O God of mystery, you disclose the secret hidden for countless ages. For you we wait; for you we listen.

Upon hearing your voice may we, like Mary, embrace your will and become a dwelling fit for your Word.

Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Advent Readings				Themes	
Advent 1	Is 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8	Ps 80 (79)	1 Cor 1:3-9	Mk 13:33-37	End of Time
Advent 2	Is 40:1-5, 9-11	Ps 85 (84)	2 Pet 3:8-14	Mk 1:1-8	John the Baptist
Advent 3	Is 61:1-2, 10-11	Magnificat	1 Thess 5:16-24	Jn 1:6-8, 19-28	John the Baptist
Advent 4	2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16	Ps 89 (88)	Rom 16:25-27	Lk 1:26-38	Mary

To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

Rom 16:25 Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen. (NRSV)

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The Jerusalem Bible (but not the New Jerusalem Bible) sensibly makes three sentences of this elevated and dense passage. In the original, however, it is a single, somewhat awkward sentence, bringing Romans to a close on a synthetic note. However, it would appear that these verses do not come from the hand of the apostle himself but seem to be a later addition.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

The context of the Roman letter is clear enough. Paul wrote to the Romans *before* his final journey to Jerusalem to advise them on how to live together harmoniously. The presenting issue was conflict over how much of the LAW should be observed / retained / set aside, with Christians of Jewish and Gentile extraction taking up opposing positions.

The context of the final doxology (our verses) seems to be different, reflecting a crisis triggered by Marcion (c.85-c.160). Marcion radically separated the OT and the NT, Judaism and Christianity. In pursuit of that, he reduced the emerging NT to ten letters of Paul (edited) and a version of the Gospel according to Luke. He rejected the OT entirely. This truly radical dichotomy between the Old and New Testaments was rejected as heretical (although such an impulse may still be felt at popular level).

Scholars have traced a potential Jewish form of the original, as follows, with later Christianising insertions in brackets:

To him who is able to strengthen you [according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ]

According to the revelation of the mystery

Kept silent for long ages; [now manifest through the prophetic writings]

According to the command of the eternal God

Made known to the obedience of faith;[to all Gentiles]

To the only wise God [through Jesus Christ]

KIND OF WRITING

This is a doxology, a liturgical formula giving glory to God. These may be found elsewhere in the NT, especially in the Deuteropauline letters, and are typical of later Christian usage. The whole doxology is either lacking or located elsewhere (after 14:23 or 15:33) in other early manuscripts and most likely is not original to the letter. This does not mean it is not part of Scripture; it simply means that the boundary between text and tradition in antiquity was more fluid than we usually permit ourselves to imagine.

The present doxology may have entered the tradition in a special context. Marcion mutilated the letter to the Romans to fit his opinions. As part of the church response, later Paulinists inserted this doxology to counter Marcion. Traces of his supercessionism (the idea that Christianity *displaces* Judaism) are countered by the affirmation of continuity with the prophetic writings. See the editorial adjustments above.

RELATED PASSAGES

Examples of similar doxologies

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20–21)

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1Timothy 1:17)

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our

Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:24–25)

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2Peter 3:18)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 25 Traces of genuine Pauline terminology are given a new context by the later language of orthodoxy (strengthen, revelation, mystery). “According to the proclamation (kerygma) of Jesus Christ” is found nowhere else in the NT. Paul is thus yoked to later concerns.

Verse 26 Again some genuinely Pauline terms are juxtaposed with the later language of emerging orthodoxy. At the later time, Christian *leaders* were referred to as prophets (Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; Rev 18:20; Mart. Pol. 16.2). 2Peter 3:16 refers to Paul’s letters as “writings.” The exclusion of the Jews in “to all the Gentiles” is the at odds with Romans 9-11 and even with the theme enunciated in Romans 1:16-17.

Verse 27 God is wise because he has only now disclosed the secret of the mystery. The final phrase, literally from aeons to aeons, shifts the eschatological timeframe indeterminably.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. If you were to compose your own doxology, what would you include in your praise and thanksgiving to God?
2. The excitement of discovery is evident in these verses. When did you find yourself suddenly alive to the message of the Gospel? How are you today?
3. Living discipleship means attending to God’s word and the promptings of the Spirit. Prayer: Lord, may your word penetrate my heart and change my life.

PRAYER

God, we stand before the mystery of your being, in wonder and awe. You are greater than that our hearts and yet we can love you in the Holy Spirit. You are greater than our minds, and yet we can know you in Jesus Christ.

Draw us every more deeply into your being that we come to that fulfilment which alone satisfies the longings of the human heart. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Your house shall be made sure forever before me

2 Sam 7:1 Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” 3 Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.”

4 But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: 5 Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 8 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; 9 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This reading is one of the key texts of the Hebrew Bible, for Jews first of all but also for Christians. It forms the background to later hopes for a future David-like king and eventually the background for the early Christian identification of Jesus as a descendant of David (see Rom 1:3). It forms an appropriate passage to reflect upon as we approach the birth of “David’s son.” The full 2 Samuel 7 should be read to make sense of it all.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

The passage is a fairly straightforward narrative, taking from the second book of Samuel. There are really just two speeches, a short one by David and a much longer one by God. According to the text, David had just brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, his capital. That was clearly a very political move.

Before that, God’s presence—symbolised by the ark—went with the people wherever they wandered, a kind of itinerant “God of the open spaces” (one possible meanings of *El Shaddai*). By taking to himself the symbol of God’s presence, David increased his power and control over people. Psalm 132 captures very much the same royal theology of the house of David

KIND OF WRITING

The passage is full of royal ideology, but there is also a prophetic voice. Nathan has a very important role here, in 2 Samuel 12 and again in 1 Kings 1. Nathan makes David stop short of (literally!) domesticating God. At the same time, there is a powerful expression of God’s own faithfulness.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

As for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised your father David, saying, “There shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel.”

“If you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut Israel off from the land that I have given them; and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a taunt among all peoples. (1Kings 9:4–7)

Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David. (Psalms 122:3–5) Cf. Ps 132:13–17 for the ark of the covenant.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 A rare moment of respite in the bellicose career of David.

Verse 2 An implied intention.

Verse 5 A rhetorical question, followed in the omitted text by a description of God as itinerant, always “with” his wandering people. The tone in the next verse (not in our reading) is sarcastic really – does God *need* a house?

Verse 8 Evoking the call of David in 1 Sam 16:11.

Verse 9 “Being with you” is almost a name for God in the bible.

Verse 10 A future promise based on past reality.

Verse 11 God reviews the history of the Israelites. Punning on the word house (meaning also, as in English, dynasty) God turns the tables on David.

Verse 16 This promise lays the foundation of Jewish and later Christian hopes that God would send a descendent of David to shepherd his people again.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The domestication of God is always a risk for believers, even though we know he is greater than our hearts and kinds. Remember the moments when the sheer otherness of God was particularly real for you.

2. Another name for God in the Bible could be Ever Faithful. When have I been aware, in spite of all that was going on, that, yes, God was beside me all along. Thanksgiving.

3. The ark, symbol of God’s roving presence, shows God not at all bound by structures, where real or virtual, architectural or ecclesiastical. Hence we may say, in faith, that God is present to us fully, always, everywhere, no matter what. We are not always conscious of this and then, in certain moments, we are. Amen.

4. His kingdom will have no end – a prayer we say every Sunday in the creed. The kingdom of God in Jesus’ proclamation grounds all our hope.

PRAYER

God ever faithful, show yourself again as constant love, always with us, even when we are not with you. Teach us to build our hopes on your foundations, that by setting aside our limited vision we may never take you for granted.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

THE LITURGY

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16; Psalm 89 [88]; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

READINGS 1 AND 3

The reading is essential background for the Annunciation, which mentions David explicitly in vv. 27 and 32 (v.33 his kingdom will last forever). The theme of God's fidelity to David (and his house) is a way of speaking of God's continued faithfulness and the continuity of God's revelation in Jesus. That is why David is so important in the NT.

Without even trying to be pedantic (!), here is the full list of occurrences of "David." It may remind us of our Jewish roots. Matt 1:1, 6, 17, 20; 9:27; 12:3, 23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42-43, 45; Mark 2:25; 10:47-48; 11:10; 12:35-37; Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4, 11; 3:31; 6:3; 18:38-39; 20:42, 44; John 7:42; Acts 1:16; 2:25, 29, 31, 34; 4:25; 7:45; 13:22, 34, 36; 15:16; Rom 1:3; 4:6; 11:9; 2 Tim 2:8; Heb 4:7; 11:32; Rev 3:7; 5:5; 22:16.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 89 (88) is an extensive royal Davidic psalm, being some 52 verses long. It is a song thanking God for his faithful love. The lectionary doesn't use the whole psalm (too long), but here are the verses that mention David by name and by title.

You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant *David*: 'I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said: "I have set the crown on *one who is mighty*, I have exalted one chosen from the people. I have found my servant *David*; with my holy oil I have anointed him; my hand shall always remain with him; my arm also shall strengthen him. Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to *David*? (Psalms 89:3-4, 19-21, 49)

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16

This important reading makes its point with wit. King David wanted to build God a house, meaning a temple; God refuses but promises instead to build him

a house, meaning dynasty to which God will always be faithful. Remember we are told in Matthew, that Joseph was "of David's house and line". In today's Gospel, Luke says the same.

Second reading

Romans 16:25-27

How you end a piece of writing is just as important as the start and today we have the very last verses of the great letter to the Romans. After all the complicated argument, Paul opens his heart in prayer.

Gospel

Luke 1:26-38

Our attention falls naturally on the interaction between Mary and the angel. To hear is afresh, perhaps you might listen out for what is said about the baby to be born, whose birth we mark next Thursday.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 22 December

1 Samuel 1:24-28

Hannah very much wanted to have a baby and, after the child's birth, sang a great song of thanksgiving. Hannah's song was the inspiration behind Mary's own song of thanksgiving, the Magnificat, in Luke's Gospel.

Tuesday 23 December

Malachi 3:1-4,23-24

To music lovers, this reading will sound familiar, from Handel's *Messiah*. Malachi says that a figure like Elijah will usher in the end. This was taken to be John the Baptist who ushered in, so to speak, the Messiah and the messianic age.

Christmas Eve and Day.

This reading is familiar from funerals, but not confined to those sad occasions. On the contrary, the invitation, open all the time, is full of joy and hope.

Friday 26 December St Stephen

Acts 6:8-10, 7:54-59

As you listen, you may notice in the account of Stephen's death many echoes

of Jesus' death in Luke's Gospel, such as praying for his enemies.

Saturday 27 Dec St John

John 1:1-4

This magnificent introduction takes us, in very simple words, to the hear of the incarnation.

WEEKDAY REFLECTIONS

Of the various celebrations of the Feast of Christmas, the readings for the Mass during the day are especially profound and beautiful. We all know the familiar Lucan Christmas narrative (read at the Vigil Mass and the Mass at dawn), but the earthshaking and life-changing prologue hymn to the Gospel of John is the perfect capstone to the scriptures of the Advent season.

At the beginning of Advent we envision Christ the King as the one who brings God's reign in all its apocalyptic fullness. In the midst of the season we begin to reflect on the Jesus of history. Now in John's prologue, Christ the Logos, the Word of God made flesh, is revealed to have been present "in the beginning."

The ancient hymn *Corde Natus ex Parentis* (*Of the Father's Love Begotten*) is a perfect commentary of this reading. It is probably the most ancient hymn we have expressly celebrating the mystery of the Incarnation. The text by Aurelius Prudentius, a Roman Christian, was written around 400, just after the date when Christmas is first mentioned as a feast. The tune, *Divinum mysterium*, is a lovely medieval plainchant melody.

See how beautifully the text (in a 19th-century translation by English Anglican John Mason Neale) matches the prologue to the Gospel of John:

Of the Father's love begotten,
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source and ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore!

NCR (*Marty Haugen*)