

THE DAWN FROM ON HIGH

Take-Home 5: The Word Made Flesh (Luke 2; John 1:1-14)

WHAT WE FOUND

Caesar counted his empire and, without knowing it, delivered David's heir to David's town. The announcement went to shepherds, and the sign was a child laid where lambs feed: the God who promised in Isaiah 40:11 to gather lambs in his arms began by joining the flock. Simeon took the child in his arms and sang Isaiah over him, gathering two verses into one line: 42:6 gives the servant as a covenant and a light to the nations, and 49:6 makes him a light so that salvation reaches the end of the earth. "A light for revelation to the Gentiles." And John 1:14 answered the promise that had stood open since Session 2, Isaiah 40:5: the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, "we have beheld his glory."

We gathered every name the child collected across our five weeks: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Immanuel (Emmanuel in Matthew's Greek), Son of the Most High, Son of God, and, at the last, the name the angel gave: Jesus, which means the LORD saves. And each of us answered the study's sealed question one final time: Israel's hopes were fulfilled beyond anything anyone had guessed, in God the Son come among us as one of us. Our study's title came home too: "when the day shall dawn upon us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness" (Luke 1:78-79), the canticle many of us have been praying since week one.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Athanasius

"For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." He took what is ours to give us a share in what is his. Not that we become additional gods: by grace we are made sharers in God's own life.

On the Incarnation 54, as quoted in CCC 460

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Leo the Great

"Christian, recognize your dignity." Leo tells the baptized not to return by sin to what they were rescued from. And since the Son assumed the nature we all share, the Church draws his charge outward too: do not despise that nature, in yourself or in anyone else.

Christmas sermon (Sermo 22), as quoted in CCC 1691

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Francis of Assisi

Francis had a place prepared with hay, an ox, and a donkey, so that he could see with his own eyes the poverty in which the newborn King lay; the townspeople came with lights and song. The living Nativity, and much of the household creche devotion that followed, traces to that night. Do not just discuss the mystery. Go look at it.

Greccio, 1223, often called the first living Nativity; Thomas of Celano, First Life, ch. 30

LIVE IT: CARRYING THE DAWN INTO ORDINARY TIME

1. Keep the Christmas season like a Catholic: it continues through Epiphany to the Baptism of the Lord. Leave the creche up, and in the spirit of St. Francis at Greccio, visit it once with intention, telling the Lord your final answer in person.

2. Adopt Simeon's prayer for good: the Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32) at bedtime, as the Church prays every night at Compline. Let it outlive the study.
3. Be a shepherd: make it known. Do your one act of telling before Epiphany.
4. February 2, Candlemas, forty days after Christmas: the Church reads Simeon's scene and blesses candles. It is this study's unofficial reunion feast; put it on the calendar.

MEMORY VERSE

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father." (John 1:14)

WITH OUR THANKS

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Merry Christmas, and glory to God in the highest.
Catechism references from this session: CCC 460, 525, 529, 1691.