

## Psalm 96

As this special night is finally upon us, the Psalm helps us to understand the song of the Angels, proclaiming the birth of the King of Kings. The sheer joy of the words in this Psalm is set against the context that the Lord of the whole earth is indeed worthy to be praised – and so we should do exactly that on this of all nights, when our salvation enters the world. That all nations are called to praise God in this Psalm is echoed in the host of Angels praising God to the astonishment of the Shepherds. It is all too easy for us to become parochial and defensive regarding the Faith, almost as if it is something we own simply for ourselves. This Psalm, and this night, remind us that God is the Lord of the whole world. Rejoice and be glad!

## Elements of the Mass

### Bambini

The Bambino is the image of the Christ Child that is placed in the crib. Very often at the beginning of Midnight Mass this small image is carried by the priest so that people can see it and adore their Saviour. The priest might wear a humeral veil as a sign that what he carries is special and holy. Traditionally the image is placed upon the altar during the Mass as a reminder that in each and every Mass the Lord is present with us in the Blessed Sacrament. At the end of Mass the image is taken to the crib where it is honoured with incense and will remain for Christmastide. Very often the priest will follow the Franciscan tradition of genuflecting to the crib. When you return home from Midnight Mass why not place your own Bambino in your home crib and say a prayer. Perhaps you might sing a verse of a well-known carol. The crib should be at the centre of our homes in this Christmas time – it is a good way to tell people about God's love for them.

### From the Fathers

Awake, mankind! For your sake God has become man. Awake, you who sleep, rise up from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you. I tell you again: for your sake, God became man. You would have suffered eternal death, had he not been born in time. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had he not taken on himself the likeness of sinful flesh. You would have suffered everlasting unhappiness, had it not been for this mercy. You would never have returned to life, had he not shared your death. You would have been lost if he had not hastened to your aid. You would have perished, had he not come. Let us then joyfully celebrate the coming of our salvation and redemption. Let us celebrate the festive day on which he who is the great and eternal day came from the great and endless day of eternity into our own short day of time.

From 'Sermon 185' by St Augustine of Hippo (354-430, bishop, theologian)

24th December  
2020

Christmas Day  
(Midnight Mass)

## At the appointed time



St Luke's account of the Nativity of Our Lord is very orderly: Jesus comes, as it were, at the appointed time, when, as the great Christmas Proclamation puts it: 'the whole world was at peace'. And yet peace is exactly what the world does not have. Around us, men, women and children are hurt, injured and killed by their fellows; and indeed in each of our hearts a war rages on, where the forces that would lure us into sin and division try to lure the will away from doing what our conscience tells us is right. There is so little peace. But in that stable, 2018 years ago (or thereabouts) a boy was born, a boy heralded as the 'Prince of Peace'. He came to show mankind a different way, and actually to bring it about, inaugurating a new age, the age of the church, the Body of Christ, where love becomes the fundamental and guiding principle in all we do. In this little boy, this baby, laid in a manger, is all the hope in the world, all the hope in the world for a better world. But in order for him to make the biggest difference, we have to invite him into our lives and hearts. This Christmas, let's do just that, that the whole world may indeed be at peace, and that peace may begin in and with me.