
24 Wednesday [Evening Vigil]

CHRISTMAS EVE

Isaiah 62: 1 - 5
Ps 88: 4 – 5, 16 – 17, 27, 29
Acts 13: 16 – 17, 22 - 25
Matt. 1: 1 - 25

Doesn't it seem strange, to our modern ways of thinking, that the very beginning of the very first chapter of the first book of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the start of the New Testament, is a long list of names which in reality mean little or nothing to even the most devout Christian? So, in practice, Mass celebrants proclaiming the Gospel on the vigil of Christmas, leave out the first 17 verses of St Matthew's gospel. But skipping those verses means missing something the evangelist thought important enough to place before the story of Mary and Joseph and "how the birth of Jesus Christ came about". Those verses "place" Jesus in the whole scope of the history of the people of Israel. He is the summit that history leads to. He is the centre of the story of God's dealing with His people. He is connected to real people of history; His birth isn't an isolated, unconnected event. What we celebrate this Christmas Eve is the high-point of a story that's much longer than just that of Joseph and Mary.

Starting with the great historical figures of God's chosen ones, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Matthew's list continues with the great and not so great kings and judges, holy men and sinners alike, and finally a list of 'unknowns' until he comes to Joseph, husband of Mary. In other words, Jesus' family ancestors, His human relatives, while including some very specially great men, and women, also include a typical cross-section of sinful anonymous humanity. His family really is us, in all our frailty and brokenness. And His birth is "God among us".