

## Isaiah 52.7-10

The Good News announced to the Shepherds on the hillside is an echo of this hymn-like piece of prophecy from Isaiah. Those watching the sheep receive a song from those watching for the coming of the Lord. Isaiah's language here is stunning in its triumphalism – the great understanding of what is coming into the world and the redemption of Israel at hand. For all of us at Christmas, the entry into the world of this child is a source of great joy. But we must never forget that the redemption of the world is completed not by what this child does today, but by the Passion and the Cross. Rejoice for our redemption is here, but keep your eyes on Jerusalem, on the Way of the Cross, and of a tomb which will stand empty.

## Saints & Heroes

### St Anastasia

Following on from our last article about a 'minor' saint, today of all days is perhaps the day when other saints are indeed forgotten, and yet today is the feast of St Anastasia of Sirmium. Anastasia died this day in 304 in the persecutions of Christians under the Emperor Diocletian. One legend says she was the daughter of Praetextatus; another the pupil of St Chrysogonus (who appears in the Roman Canon); a third, that she was the daughter of St Fausta of Sirmium. Anastasia herself is commemorated in the Canon (Eucharistic Prayer) and has been so since the end of the 5th century, when she clearly occupied a unique position among the saints venerated in Rome. In the East, Anastasia is even entitled 'the Deliverer from Potions', 'the Healer' or 'the Deliverer from Bonds', in testimony of the fact that she was known in her life for being a healer and exorcist. Just as in her life, today Anastasia gives way liturgically to our greater celebration of the Nativity of the Lord: the saint is one who says with John the Baptist, 'He must increase; I must decrease'. We are reminded of this example of humility and intercession today.

You gave us so many gifts on the day of your birth:  
A treasure chest of spiritual medicines for the sick;  
Spiritual light for the blind;  
The cup of salvation for the thirsty;  
The bread of life for the hungry.  
In the winter when trees are bare,  
You give us the most succulent spiritual fruit.  
In the frost when the earth is barren,  
You bring new hope to our souls.  
In December when seeds are hidden in the soil,  
The staff of life springs forth from the virgin womb

From 'Nativity Prayer' by St Ephraim (306-373, theologian)

25th December  
2020

Christmas Day

## Indwelling



So much about Christmas is about receiving. 'To those who receive him he gives power to become the children of God.' We can receive him because he has come close to us – he is now closer to us than we are to ourselves. This is the message of the Christmas Gospel. The birth of Jesus means that God is never 'out there', God is 'Emmanuel'; he is with us. In Jesus, God dwells to partake fully in our life. In our Holy Communion we do indeed receive Jesus that we may 'dwell in him and he is us'. We know to that we have become brothers and sisters with him and children of the same Heavenly Father for he teaches and inspires us to call God 'Our Father.' As we prepare to make our Christmas Communion 'let us adore him' – come to dwell for us, come to dwell with us, come to dwell in us – and let us receive him with gladness and make the joy of this marvellous time complete.

### From the Fathers

The feast day of your birth resembles You, Lord  
Because it brings joy to all humanity.  
Old people and infants alike enjoy your day.  
Your day is celebrated  
from generation to generation.  
Kings and emperors may pass away,  
And the festivals to commemorate them soon lapse.  
But your festival will be remembered until the end of time.  
Your day is a means and a pledge of peace.  
At your birth heaven and earth were reconciled,  
Since you came from heaven to earth on that day  
You forgave our sins and wiped away our guilt.

*continued over*

