



a Kendall Hunt Company

## Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year B, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14-16

Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 17, 29

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### The Word In Liturgy

On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the gospels highlight the figures of Joseph (Year A) and Mary (Years B and C), drawing our attention to the mystery of the Incarnation by way of the events immediately preceding the birth of Jesus (Year A describes the annunciation to Joseph; B, the annunciation to Mary; C, Mary's visit to Elizabeth). Today's gospel is a part of Luke's infancy narrative, a very particular literary genre whose purpose dictated both its form and content. Luke wished to indicate the divine origin of Jesus, as well as to show how his birth was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and expectations. Though following a conventional literary form (a "birth announcement"), there is a freshness in the way Luke's theological genius is used to reveal the unique character of Jesus as the Son of God. In the angel's greeting to Mary ("The Lord is with you," v. 28), Luke signals that the messianic age is upon us (cf. Zephaniah 3:14-17; Isaiah 7:14). The child is to be heir to the promises made to David, but his is a dynasty that surpasses every human expectation. By echoing the imagery of the Spirit hovering over the abyss in the Book of Genesis, Luke skillfully evokes the idea of a new creation when the angel tells Mary that "the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (v. 35). By this imagery one is also reminded of the divine presence that filled the tent in the desert (Exodus 40). Further, Luke's pointed statements regarding Mary's virginity (vv. 27, 34-35) underline the divine, miraculous character of this birth.

The first reading provides the Old Testament background to Luke 1:32-33 by telling the story of how it came about that God promised to David a "kingdom [that] shall be made sure forever" (v. 16). The tale is quite engaging, contrasting David's arrogance in proposing to



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build a grand temple for the Lord with all that the Lord has already “built” for him. To reinforce the point as to who is really in charge, God’s promise to David is a spectacular one: a dynasty that will be eternal! In subsequent generations this prophecy became the bedrock of messianic hope, sustaining the Jewish people at times when their very existence seemed threatened. In making this promise, the Lord rehearses the history of his dealings with David, reminding him of the many ways that he has saved him in the past, and reassuring him of divine protection for his heirs in the future. In the context of Christian liturgy, this text becomes a strong reminder of the many ways that God’s saving action has been a part of human history. Christian faith in the mystery of the incarnation has been prepared by the way in which God has entered human history time and time again to save us from our own sinfulness.

## **Catholic Doctrine**

### ***Incarnation***

The Incarnation is one of the central doctrinal teachings of Christianity. It could be described as the linchpin of the faith, because the affirmation that the eternal Word of God became flesh affects our whole understanding of Christ, including his paschal mystery. In the Nicene Creed we confess our belief that for the sake of all humanity, the eternal Word “came down from heaven and by the power of the Holy Spirit was born of the Virgin Mary and became man.”

We believe that the Incarnation was foretold by the prophets and is the culmination of the promise of God given to Abraham and Sarah. It is a unique and singular event in the history of the world (CCC 464) because, in the person of Jesus Christ, God and humanity are one.

The reasons for the event of the Incarnation are apparent to eyes of faith. The Church lists four reasons. First, the Word became flesh to save us by reconciling us to God (CCC 457). We believe that humanity was in such a mortal state that our healing could only occur by God descending to our human nature and visiting it. The Father sent the Son to take away our sins. Second, in the Incarnation we are shown the depth of God’s love for us (CCC 458). God acted so that we would not perish in sin but live in his love. Third, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us to exemplify holiness of life (CCC 459). Jesus showed us how to live the new law of love, which entails sacrifice and holds out to us the reward of the Beatitudes. Fourth, the Incarnation enables us to share in the divine nature (CCC 460). St. Athanasius wrote: “The Son of God became man that we might become God” (AthDI). Accordingly, by baptism we are incorporated into the mystery of Christ and are given a share in the divine nature, truly the highest calling indicated by the name we assume: Christian.

Our understanding of our own status as sons and daughters of God would have been vastly underrated had certain heresies in the early Church about the Incarnation not been successfully defeated by the great Christian thinkers and writers of the day. For example,

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Gnostic Docetism denied the true humanity of Jesus Christ (CCC 465). For this reason, in the creed of the Church, we pray that Jesus was “begotten, not made.” The Nestorians mistakenly understood that the human person of Jesus was, in effect, added on to the divine person of God’s Son in a type of hybrid (CCC 466). To combat this particular heresy, the Council of Ephesus (a.d. 431) proclaimed that Mary truly was the Mother of God by the human conception of God’s Son in her womb. The Monophysites proposed that the human nature ceased to exist in Christ when the divine person of God’s Son assumed it (CCC 467). The Council of Chalcedon (a.d. 451), to combat this heresy, proclaimed that the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, was both perfectly God and perfectly human (like to us in all things but sin), and for this reason the Church proclaims that Jesus Christ is “true God and true man.”

We believe that in the one person of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, there are united (CCC 481) in a unique and singular way two natures: God and man. Without ceasing to be God and Lord, Jesus is at the same time human. The Church confesses this belief, prays and sings this belief, and, as it prepares to celebrate Christmas, meditates before and contemplates this great mystery.

