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First Reading: Isaiah 52:7-10
Response: "**All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God**" (Ps.97:2)
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 97:1-2,7-8,12-13,17
Second Reading: Hebrews 1:1-6
Gospel: John 1:1-8

KERYGMA: Jesus Christ is the living risen Lord. He is Emmanuel, God-with-us. He is the eternal Word of God through the ages, Word made flesh, glorified, fully and deeply (mysteriously) present in our midst.

Why is Isaiah ecstatic about "**how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news**" (Is.52:7)? It is because he has seen the holy city in ruins, the temple destroyed, the holy places defiled, and people a broken nation? The **Good News** is they will be redeemed.

Celebrate the coming of the Lord. He is coming to save his people. "**Break into shouts of joy, you ruins of Jerusalem**" (Is.52:9).

When the Saviour comes, it will not be just for a time, for one people, in a single place. The new age of salvation is for all. "**The ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God**" (Ps.97:2).

All we, who are redeemed, like Mary, can the proclaim great things God has done (*Magnificat*). We "**sing a new song to the Lord for he has worked wonders**" (Ps.97:1)

In the past, the word of God was spoken in many ways. Since Christmas, the wonder of the incarnation, "**God has spoken to us through his Son**" (Heb.1:1).

Christmas is an epiphany, revealing the full *Shekinah*, presence of God, in our midst. "**He is the radiant light of God's glory**" (Heb.1;1).

The Babe of Christmas, born in Bethlehem, where shepherds watch their flocks by night, of whom herald angels sing, the joy to the world, is the "**Word made flesh and lived among us**" (Jn.1:14).

Christmas signals the beginning of work of our redemption where the Son of God became man. We look forward to his resurrection which empowers us "**to become children of God**" (Jn.1:14).

This is our sacred Tradition where through him we encounter our Risen Lord, presenting himself in the Scriptures, Liturgy, Doctrine and Witness.

SCRIPTURE: The **Readings** today relate the mystery of Christmas, Incarnation and our salvation.

LITURGY: Our **Worship** is a celebration, a personal meeting with the Lord, incarnate and risen.

DOCTRINE: In singing the carols, we enjoy the **Theological** insights, musically and poetically.

WITNESS: Put **Christ** into **Christmas**. Live the truth of faith, making it true for self and for others.

FOR THE CHILDREN

Children love a story. Read or tell them in your own way the story of Christmas. (*Scripture*)

Children like to look and see. Bring them to the crib and discuss what they see. (*Liturgy*)

Children like explanations. Explain why Jesus is born, the meaning of Christmas. (*Doctrine*)

Children like to do things. Discuss and make resolutions on what we can do for the Lord (*Witness*)

FOR TEENAGERS (Shared Christian Praxis)

- My Present Action:** *What is your understanding of Christmas?*
- Your Story and Vision:** *What are your experiences and hopes for Christmas?*
- Church's Story:** *What does the Church teach and do about Christmas?*
- Church's Story and Your Story:** *Where do you and the Church have common ground?*
- Your Vision and Church's Vision:** *What further ways can you and the Church be one mind in terms of Christmas and the building of the Kingdom?*

RCIA

The word 'Christmas' consists of two words, viz. **Christ + Mass**. The birthday of Jesus Christ is celebrated with a special Eucharist (Mass). That basically, is the origin of Christmas and how it should be today.

LIFE EXPERIENCE

We grew up in a tradition where we went as a family to Midnight Mass. Our non-Catholic neighbours joined us, after which we wished one another and went home to receive our presents. How do we celebrate today? How many of us invite non-Catholic neighbours to join us?

LITTLE ANGELINA

I was admiring the family Jesse Tree with a figure on top to which I referred as a fairy. I was corrected by an indignant Angelina, who questioned my theology and politely informed me how it was not a fairy but an angel that announced the Good News.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn. 1:1)

These are the opening words of the Gospel, in the New Testament (Jn. 1:1), reminiscent of the opening words of the first book of the Bible, in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:1). "Beresheth bara Elohim." In the beginning God created, by his almighty Word, with the Spirit hovering above. Now by the power of the Spirit, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:14).

Watchword: "And the Word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14)

Hebrew: וְהָדְבַר נִהְיָה בָשָׂר וַיִּשְׁכֵּן בְּתוֹכֵנוּ

Vehadavar niheyah vasar wayishkon bethokhenu.

Greek: Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν.

Kai ho logos sarks egeneto kai eskenosen en hemin.

Latin: Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis.

Portuguese: E o Verbo se fez carne e habitou entre nos.

Spanish: Y aquel Verbo fue hecho carne, y habito entre nosotros.

French: Celui qui est la Parole est devenu un home et a vecu parmi nous.

German: Und das Wort ward Fleisch und wohnte unter uns..

Afrikaans: Die Woord het mens geword en onder ons kom woon.

Zulu: IZWI laba inyama lahlala phakathi kwethu.

Xhosa: ULizwi ke waba ngumntu waza wahlala phakathi kwethu.

Sotho: Lentswe ya eba motho, la aha hara rona.

Irish: Rinneadh feoil den Brhriathar.

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CATECHETICAL COURSE

Lesson 3: Sacred Scripture and Catechesis

Sacred Scripture is one of the four pillars of catechesis. It is an important source of the Tradition of the Church, commonly called the 'Bible', meaning 'book' i.e. God's Holy Book containing his in-

spired word or **divine revelation**. St. Paul teaches “all Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim.3:16).

While God is the divine author of the Bible, he uses human persons to write it. Naturally the writings also betray their human situations and personalities. However, being written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the word of God is free from error insofar as it reveals God Himself and his plan of salvation. This is known as the **‘inerrancy of the Bible.’**

The major divisions of the Bible are the Old and New Testaments. The word ‘Testament’ is used in the sense of ‘agreement’ or **‘covenant.’** The Old Testament records the old covenant God made with his people, Israel. It is seen as a preparation and prophetic of a new messianic covenant that is to come. The **New Testament** is a record of the fulfilment of this new covenant that God has made for the salvation of all, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, “the fullness of God’s revelation and truth” (Jn. 1:14). The number of books the Church sees as inspired in the Bible is forty six in the Old Testament and twenty seven in the New. This fixed number of inspired books is known as the **Canon** of the Bible.

Name the 46 books of the Old Testament and 27 of the New. Examine the list of canonical books given in the Bible. Below is a division of the books.

<u>Books of the Old Testament (46)</u>		<u>Books of the New Testament (27)</u>	
Pentateuch (Torah)	- 5 books	The Gospels	- 4 books
Historical Books	- 16 books	Acts of the Apostles	- 1 book
Wisdom Books	- 7 books	Epistles (Letters)	- 21 books
Prophetic Books	- 18 books	Apocalypse (Revelation)	- 1 book

N.B: In the early days of the Church there was no Canon of the Bible as such, i.e. no fixed rule about which books were inspired. It was not clear to the Jews either. It was later in the first century of the Christian era, at the council of Jamnia (Jabneh), that the Jews decided which books to canonize. Formerly, the Sadducees accepted only the Torah (Pentateuch) while the Pharisees accepted as well, the writings of the prophets and sages of Israel. Likewise with some in the early Christians, it was not clear which books were inspired. The Church guided by the Holy Spirit in her councils, Rome (382 A.D.) and Hippo (393 A.D.), defined and confirmed the Canon of the Bible. So the Bible derives its Canon from the Church which recognizes it as part of her Tradition.

The Church sees the whole bible as God revealing himself to us, “lovingly meeting and talking to his children” (Vat. II. Constitution on Divine Revelation 21). This is precisely the meaning and role of Scripture in our lives and catechetics.

The Church is entitled to interpret the word in accordance with the fullness of its tradition, God-given authority and guarantee of guidance from the Holy Spirit. While having the authority to interpret the Bible, the Church also encourages all her members to read and reflect on the word of God, be it privately or in groups, for to be ignorant of the Bible is to be lacking in the knowledge of Christ (*ignorantia scripturae, ignorantia Christi*).

The Bible in Life

Catechetics does not simply involve knowing the truths of our faith but living it to the fullest. We have to know the Word of God and keep it, like Mary, we “treasure it” (Lk.2:51). We cherish our scriptures in our worship and carry it solemnly, in the sacred liturgy, to its throne, the lectern. The Bible should also be enthroned in our homes with prayer, reflection and sharing, even kissing the hands that touch it. This is how the Jews “kiss the *mezuzah*” a biblical text nailed to the doorpost of their homes. Here is a physical and spiritual contact with the word of God. Ways of meditation on the word can be taught as well, such as *lectio divina* and centering prayer.

PILLARS OF CATECHESIS

SCRIPTURE	LITURGY	DOCTRINE	WITNESS
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