Today, gathered together on the last Sunday before Christmas, we hear the story of the event that made this all possible: the angel Gabriel's extraordinary announcement and the Blessed Virgin Mary's obedient acceptance. Note that Gabriel greets her with the words, "The Lord is with you." These words greet us as well at the beginning of every Mass. The Lord is with us as well. Whenever we come together to celebrate the Eucharist we are greeted as Mary was greeted over two thousand years ago. May we recognize this as we respond in song and prayer to God's invitation.

As we gather let us begin our service by professing what we believe.

Profession of Faith p.
I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, (*bow as we say*) ***and by the Holy Spirit he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.*** **For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Introductory Rite:
Greeting:
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Blessed be God forever. **Blessed be God forever.**

Penitential Rite: p.
Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to participate in this sacred celebration.

I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. **Amen**

Opening Prayer:
Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Liturgy of the Word:

First Reading p.
A reading from the Prophet Samuel *2 Samuel 7: 1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16*

When King David was settled in his palace, and the LORD had given him rest from his enemies on every side, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!" Nathan answered the king, "Go, do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you." But that night the LORD spoke to Nathan and said: "Go, tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Should you build me a house to dwell in?'" It was I who took you from the pasture and from the care of the flock to be commander of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you went, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. And I will make you famous like the great ones of the earth. I will fix a place for my people Israel; I will plant them so that they may dwell in their place without further disturbance. Neither shall the wicked continue to afflict them as they did of old, since the time I first appointed judges over my people Israel. I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also reveals to you that he will establish a house for you. And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever."

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Responsorial Psalm *Psalm 89: 2-3, 4-5, 27, 29*

R/. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.
R/. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

The promises of the LORD I will sing forever; through all generations my mouth shall proclaim your faithfulness.
For you have said, "My kindness is established forever"; in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness. **R/.**

"I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant:
Forever will I confirm your posterity and establish your throne for all generations." **R/.**

"He shall say of me, 'You are my father, my God, the Rock, my savior.'
Forever I will maintain my kindness toward him, and my covenant with him stands firm." **R/.**

Second Reading

A reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans *Romans 16: 25-27*

To him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel *Luke 1: 26-38*

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke **Glory to you, Lord**

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Reflection on the Word:

- Before choosing Mary to bear the Messiah, God chose David to be anointed as king of Israel. Today we hear David, living in the royal palace, reflect on how much grander his residence is than the tent where the ark of the covenant was kept. God tells Nathan the prophet that it is neither the palace of David nor the tent of the ark that is important. It is that the Messiah will come from the house of David, a house greater than even a royal palace, a house that will endure much longer than something made by human hands. God values the family line of David more than an object, no matter how sacred it is. God chooses to establish a house, not for the ark, but for David's lineage, a lineage that will one day include God's Son.

- It is tempting to discount the Blessed Virgin Mary's obedience to God's will as inevitable. After all, she was immaculately conceived and had never sinned. But this would be a denial of her humanity. As with all other human beings, she was blessed with free will. She could have freely refused to bear the Son of God. Instead, she willingly consents to the plan God has in store for her. She chooses obedience to God's will, voluntarily and resolutely. In this way, she is playing a vital role in the salvation of the world. She will give birth to the Savior, who is also a) fully human, b) sinless, and c) able to freely choose to be obedient to the Father's will.

- On the other hand, none of us are sinless. We continually struggle with the temptation to ignore God's will and use our free will to choose the opposite. It is a challenge to say to God, "May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). But by doing so, we, like Mary, make the Incarnation possible. We continue to make Jesus present in the world.

Question of the Week
When do I find it difficult to let go of my own will and trust in God's?

Prayer of the Faithful:
As we await the coming of the Lord, let us make room in our hearts for the needs of our community and the world beyond and lift them up to the source of all good gifts.

- For the Church, that we may look to Mary as a model of accepting the responsibility of bearing Jesus to the world, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- That leaders around the world might work for peace and justice within and between nations, recognizing the presence of God in all people, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- For those who suffer in poverty, that they may know the generosity of the Lord through the goodwill offerings of those blessed with plenty, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- That those having difficulty at this time of year because they are mourning the loss of a loved one may bring their grief before the Christ child and his mother Mary, who comfort all those who mourn, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- For our families, that we may reconcile whatever divisions that have grown between us and nurture the harmony we value, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- For what else should we pray? Let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- For all the prayers that we hold in the silence of our hearts; for all our intentions spoken and unspoken, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

God of comfort and joy, you watched over David in his house of cedar, Mary and Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem, and your Son in the manger. Watch over us as we live our lives in witness to our faith in you. Hear this and all our prayers through your Son, our long-awaited Savior, Jesus Christ.

Communion Rite

The Lord's Prayer: p.
Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words our Savior gave us.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Rite of Peace:
The sign of peace outwardly expresses a deep spiritual reality; through this sign we acknowledge Christ's presence in each other and share the peace we have received from Him. Let us offer each other the sign of peace.

Communion:
Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

The body of Christ. **Amen.**

Prayer after Communion:
Having received this pledge of eternal redemption, we pray, almighty God, that, as the feast day of our salvation draws ever nearer, so we may press forward all the more eagerly to the worthy celebration of the mystery of your Son's Nativity.

Through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Concluding Rite:
Final Blessing:
May the Lord bless us, ✠ protect us from all evil and lead us to everlasting life. **Amen**

Go in peace! **Thanks be to God.**