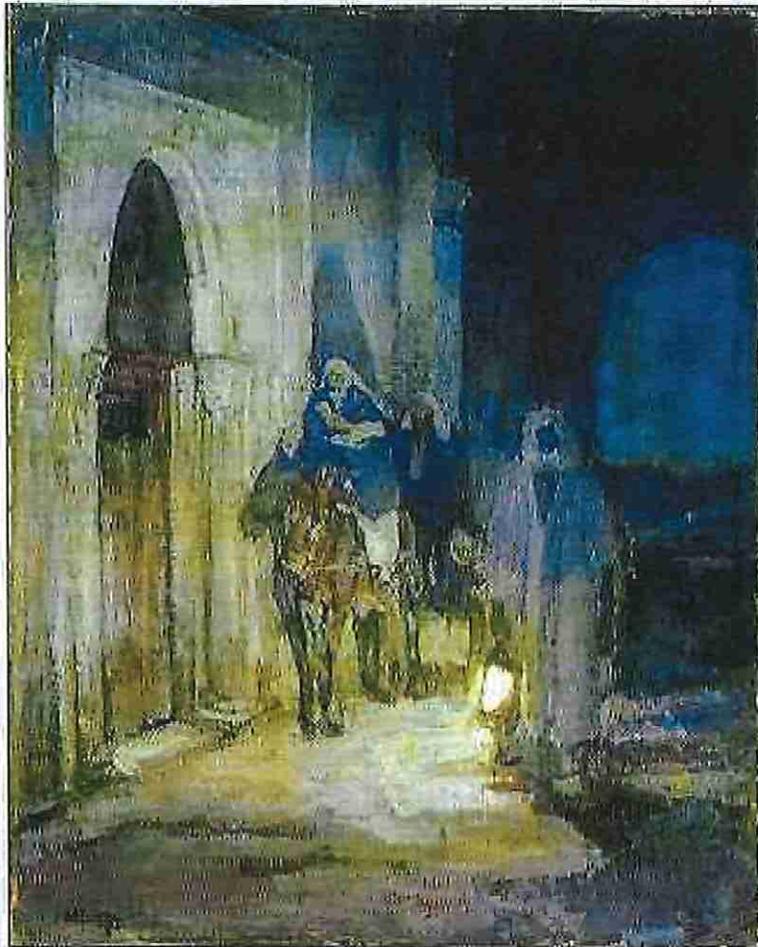


# Remembering the Christmas Story:

## *Our Spiritual Heritage*

JEANETTE MARTINO LAND



Christmas story. The prophets, whose actions are recorded in the Bible, received their prophetic ministry from God. Their lives of penance and sacrifice were entirely devoted to this divine calling. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "Through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel," God announced the coming of the Messiah (#522). "When the Church reads the Old Testament, she searches there for what the Spirit, 'who has spoken through the prophets,' wants to tell us about Christ" (#702). Isaiah is said to be the greatest of all the divinely inspired prophets. Known as the Prophet of Advent, Isaiah foretells that "the Lord himself will give you a sign; the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Immanuel" (Is 7:14). Later, Isaiah describes the future king: "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace" (Is 9:5). The Church regards these words as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ and uses this passage for the introit of the Mass on Christmas Day.

Christmas is the remarkable story of how much a part of us God chooses to be; yet we forget that Christmas is the feast of our redemption, that God's promise of salvation is fulfilled by his great and wondrous love-gift to the world: Jesus. We get caught up in parties and presents and ignore the Real Presence of the God who is with us. We are so caught up with the birth of the Baby that we forget the rest of the story. A story that began in the past, continues in the present, and impacts the future.

We forget the role the prophets played in the

"The prophet Micah prophesies that God promises a ruler from Bethlehem: "But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah least among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; Whose origin is from of old, from ancient times" (Mic 5:1).

The statement, "The best interpretation of a prophecy is the history of its fulfillment," is attributed to Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman (1802-1865), a prominent English leader of the nineteenth century. He maintained that biblical prophecies are fulfilled when the prophecy comes to pass in history. It came to

pass that the Messiah promised to Israel is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus on the first Christmas, when an angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds, "For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord" (Lk 2:11).

Thus begins God's initiative in the redemption of man, the evidence of his care and love for us. The King of Kings, the Son of God made man who is God himself, humbles himself to be born of a virgin in order to share in our humanity. The Catholic News Agency suggests these or similar words for the "Blessing of a Christmas Crèche": "Through all the days of Christmas may these figures (Mary, Joseph, shepherds, animals) tell the story of how humans, angels, and animals found the Christ in this poor place" ([www.catholicnewsagency.com/resource](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resource)).

Amidst the worldly glitter of our Christmas festivities, it is easy to forget the poverty of The Holy Family. Jesus was born in a dirty, smelly stable because "there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7). Even before his impending birth, Jesus experienced the rejection of his own people. The first witnesses to the Holy Birth were simple shepherds who were considered outcasts, the lowest class in a class-conscious society. Their humble hearts enabled them to be the first people invited to see Jesus.

Is there room for Jesus in our hearts? Do we welcome Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior? Or is the inn of our heart too full of self, too absorbed in the things of this world, too closed or too proud to be open to the presence of the God who desires to be with us? Perhaps hospitality is so prevalent during the Christmas season to make up for the lack of hospitality experienced by the Holy Family.

We go out of our way to invite others into our homes; we open our hearts and give our time, talent, and treasure to those who are less fortunate; we share the hope, peace, joy, and love that are the

gifts of Christmas. Even infrequent worshipers find in Christmas a "homecoming feast," hopefully, a welcoming one.

These lines from G.K. Chesterton's "The House of Christmas" capture the essence of hospitality:

There fared a mother driven forth  
Out of an inn to roam;  
In the place where she was homeless  
All men are at home. (<https://allpoetry.com>)

Christmas is not to be limited to the celebration of one day or one season. The spirit of Christmas, which is God's love, is to be shared all year. We are to be aware of the many faces of Christ: in the poor, the homeless, the hurting, the lonely, the ill, the friend, the stranger, the relative; anyone who is emotionally, spiritually, or physically in need. When we listen to the readings at Mass, we are called not only to listen to the Word, but to be modern-day prophets who not only announce, but bring the Good News to all people and all nations. We are the hope of the future.

In looking to the future, it is important to remember the past. As the People of God in the New Covenant, the Church "discovers her link with the Jewish People." (#839) The "Christian's hope takes up and fulfills the hope of the chosen people" (#1819). For Christians, the promise of the Messiah is fulfilled in the Birth of Jesus, "who died and rose from the dead and is recognized as Lord and Son of God" (#840).

As we celebrate Christmas, let us remember that God's promise of salvation is for all and is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, as foretold by the prophets. This is our spiritual heritage. Let us pray for Christian unity that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). God is with us, yesterday, today, and forever. ✠

#### Works Cited

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [www.vatican.va/archive/](http://www.vatican.va/archive/)  
ENG0015