

DECEMBER 20 2025 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

As we go to Christmas—five days only to Christmas—we really step into that mystery of Christmas.

And Sunday we almost have the same readings: the same first reading and the Gospel, but in the version of Matthew and not Luke. Luke has the Annunciation; Matthew doesn't. But it's the same. It draws us into the greatest miracle of all time—that Christmas, how Jesus is the Son of God, and that Jesus is fully divine and fully human.

The historians, of course, and scientists have a field day with this, because it's an article of faith. You cannot measure it, you cannot prove it. But we, as believers, we, a people of faith, we know it is true—that Mary is the Mother of God. And that the angel Gabriel came to Mary and asked her. And Mary just doesn't say accept, she just says, "How can this be?" "How can this be?" But she accepts: "Let it be done to me."

And it's so important, those words, "Let it be done to me," for each one of us, actually, as we go along our life's journey. And Christmas is such a beautiful time of renewal in our own lives. Rebirth. Rebirth for some of us, as we go to the new year, also making resolutions to work on some of our shadows in our lives, our shortcomings. But it is something to pray with.

Like I said, the historians, of course, they'll have a field day with this, because you can't measure it or prove it. But some of the experts, they actually say that Mary and Elizabeth—Elizabeth who is in her sixth month—are part of the Essene community. We often hear in scripture about the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and so on, but we never hear anything about the Essenes.

And there is a conjecture that John the Baptist, John, was one of the Essenes, and that he was not far from the Essene community of Qumran, where he was baptizing in the Jordan. And they had the baptism already. There was a monastic community living in the desert, of men who immersed themselves every day in water—baptism almost every day.

And then there were all kinds of Essenes in different communities, because if you just have a bunch of celibate men together, there's no procreation, so you're dying. But there were all kinds of Essenes quietly living their faith in different communities and not getting stuck in the political scene.

And so a conjecture is that John the Baptist actually was given up at a very young age to the Qumran community, and to become a monastic. And Elizabeth, of course, she would've been—she's in her sixth month, and she would have been overjoyed to have a child in her old age. In her time, a woman who could not conceive a child would be a disgrace, a reject.

And she really felt that she was no good, she could not have offspring, so what good is she for as a woman? And this, of course, is not anymore today. I can understand how she, in her great joy, would give up the child, like some other women in scripture, who'd given up the child to be used for God. So that you could see it was a gift of God, and that she would give up the child to God, to be used for the good of the kingdom.

And, of course, Jesus, born of Mary he was going to be named Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." And it's interesting how in the first reading of Isaiah, we have this political thing of King Ahaz, who really wants to have an alliance with Assyrians because he was afraid that they were going to get overrun. And Isaiah, who warned him to not make an alliance with Assyrians, but to rely on God only.

And he says: "The child to be born is the new kingdom." It's not a child, it's the kingdom. A new kingdom, where God is with us, called Emmanuel. And, of course, early Christians could see how this would fit perfectly with Jesus—Jesus the Emmanuel. "God is with us." And God, who brings new life to us, and shows us the way home to God again.

Amen.