

Christmas Eve Prayer Service
for Sisters of Mercy and Associates,
Christmas 2005



*Theme: Standing with Mary and Catherine in
'Today's Bethlehem'.*

*Suggested supporting resources: A lighted Candle
and either a picture of the Nativity or a Crib.*



Invitation to Prayer:

In the name of our Creator who chose Mary to give life to our Redeemer
In reverence to the Holy Spirit who overshadowed and protected Mary in her pain and struggles
In gratitude to Jesus who shared Mary's humanity and ours
In partnership with Mary who accepted humiliation and gave birth in a derelict accommodation
In praise of Mary who gave Jesus the first warm and comforting embrace
In collaboration with Mary who welcomed migrant workers, and royalty with equal grace
In solidarity with Mary who was forced to become a refugee in order to protect our Saviour
In acknowledgement of Mary's fidelity, humility, hospitality and Gift, we offer our Christmas prayer to our God.

Hymn:

1. Oh Mary, when our God chose you
to bring his dear Son to birth,
a new creation made in you
gave joy to all the earth.

Refrain:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.
A new creation made in you
gave joy to all the earth.

2. In you, our God confounds the strong
and makes the crippled dance with joy;
and to our barren world belongs
God's mother and her boy. *Refrain:*
3. In empty streets and broken hearts
you call to mind what God has done;
where all God's loving kindness starts
in sending you a son. *Refrain:*
4. And Mary, while we stand with you,
may once again God's Spirit come,
and all our sisters follow you
to reach our Heavenly home. *Refrain:*



Ant: Hosanna to the new born Child. Let all in heaven and on earth give glory to our God.



1. Let me live my life in praise of you my God.
May my every breath be drawn in praise of you.
You gave me the gift of life and you have sustained me through my years.
I acknowledge your greatness and with the whole of creation I praise you.

2. You have chosen me to serve you in a unique way.
Nobody can replace me in your sight; for this I thank you.
I feel your compassion and love daily in my body.
You are my guide, security and only hope.

3. You created the earth and everything on it for my benefit.
The entire cosmos is your gift to me.
I will cherish it and work to protect and beautify it.
You gave it to me as the womb in which I am to grow until you call me to yourself.

4. With all those who have occupied this womb before me I thank you.
With all those whom you have called to yourself, I praise you.
With all those who share it with me now I acclaim you.
For all those who will come after me, I bless you.

Doxology: Glory be to you Creator of all
Glory be to you Redeemer of humanity
Glory be to you Wisdom of all ages and nations
Your sanctifying presence renews all creation
I thank you for its unity, beauty and goodness. *Amen.*

Ant: Hosanna to the new born Child. Let all in heaven and on earth give glory to our God.

Scripture Reading:

Luke 2: 1-7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirin'i-us was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. *Pause*



Reflection:

Where can we find Mercy People to stand with Mary and Catherine in ‘Today’s Bethlehem’?

Are there Mercy People who would be willing to stand for the values of this partnership?

We are the family of Catherine McAuley who was proud to promote the mantles of Mary and of Catherine.

we are pleased to wear these mantles

We stand firmly and struggling actively for God’s poor and for women:

in derelict accommodation

in homeless centres

in shop doorways with drug addicts

in railway stations with alcoholics

in bus shelters with frightened women

in prison cells with the incarcerated

in sheltered accommodation with battered wives

in the kitchens, cloakrooms and launderettes with the working poor

in advocacy centres on behalf of those unjustly deprived of their rights

in parishes with the lonely, the sick and the dying

in refugee centres with the displaced

in tenement blocks with the poor

in literacies centres with the aspiring

in schools, colleges, and hospitals bringing the Good News of the Reign of God.

Like Mary and Catherine, we are frequently the ‘unseen’ – the ‘rejected’ because:

our witness is a threat

our attendance intimidates

our voices are a challenge

our presence is a hazard

our persistence exhausts.





We are here with Mary and Jesus this Christmas in love, in Mercy and in advocacy
Our mission is to write history from the perspective of the vanquished.

Ours is:

the emptiness of the hungry
the cups of the thirsty
the open hands of the naked
the pain of the sick
the plea of the unjustly imprisoned
the appeal of the innocent
the hope of the repentant
the cry of the homeless
the faith of the dying
the love of a Merciful God

With Mary, Catherine and Jesus we are God's Mercy and we will not be forced to 'give birth
in a stable'.

Pause

Intercessions:

In you Mary, God chose a fragile and gentle woman as the home for our Saviour. We give
thanks for this blessing on women and for the lives of all those people and children whose lives
make the joyful side of Christmas a reality for their families on a daily basis:

For women whose love and care gives security and protection to their families - *we give thanks.*

For women who recognise injustice and have the courage to confront it - *we give thanks.*

For the faith, hope, love, stamina and courage of all women who struggle to keep their families
together in war-torn nations and in areas of natural disaster - *we give thanks*

For all women who have the courage to confront alcoholic husbands or partners - *we give thanks.*

For all first-world women who make sacrifices in order to ensure that fewer third-world women
are freed from having to give birth in 'today's Bethlehem' - *we give thanks.*

For all those who will minister to the poor, needy and unloved this Christmas - *we give thanks.*



For families who have been bereaved during this year that they may find healing - *we give thanks.*

For parents who struggle to overcome selfishness for the sake of their children - *we give thanks.*

For young people who surmount temptations of drugs, alcohol and sexual activity - *we give thanks.*

For children who love, honour and respect their parents - *we give thanks.*

For our own families and friends who will communicate with us during this holy season - *we give thanks.*

For all those members of our Mercy Family who have gone before us in faith - *we give thanks.*

For all God's gifts to us and to all of humanity - *we give thanks.*

In recognition of Mary as God's Mother, in gratitude to her for the pain and struggles which she endured on that first Christmas morning, we pray: *Hail Mary ...*

Concluding Prayer:

Provident God,

You gave us the gift of redemption through the birth of Jesus. We pray that we will always be conscious of our indebtedness for this gift. During this Christmas period renew your grace in us so that we may continue to live lives of fidelity, Mercy and goodness in imitation of Mary our Mother and in preparation for an eternity of happiness with you, our God, with Jesus our Redeemer and with the Holy Spirit our Guide now and for ever. *Amen.*

Blessing:

May we make each day of this holiday Christmas for one another. *Amen*

May we remember to stand with Mary for peace, love, hospitality and justice. *Amen*

May we recognise the innocence of the Christ Child in each other this Christmas. *Amen*

May our God who created us, the Son who redeemed us and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us, bless † and protect us now and always. *Amen*