

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT, YEAR B

Second Reading Romans 16: 25–27

These final verses of St Paul's letter to the Romans are written in the form of a doxology, that is, verses glorifying God. Since they are absent from some manuscript sources of the letter, and sometimes appear in another place in the text, they are probably a later addition, written by someone very close to Paul's way of thinking.

The author ('Paul' for the sake of clarity) invites us to give glory to the Lord. This gives strength to those reading the letter, as they attempt to follow the Good News.

In the first century AD, several 'Gospels' existed. This explains why the author is anxious to emphasise the links between his own writings and the Old Testament: '*What scripture had predicted*'. Jesus Christ is the secret mystery kept hidden from the beginning of time.

The community addressed (the Romans, and us), is not only defined by who they are or where they live, but also by their trust in God, leading to obedience in faith. The writer's message reaches out to all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, across the centuries.

The letter began with an acknowledgement that '*through him, we received grace and our apostolic mission to preach the obedience of faith to all pagan nations in honour of his name*' (Romans 1: 5).



Today's final verses echo this statement and bring the letter to a conclusion: '*He alone is wisdom*'.

Gospel Luke 1: 26–38 The Annunciation

In this last week of Advent the focus moves from John the Baptist to Mary. Luke shows us a woman of faith and gives her more prominence than the other evangelists.

A virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph

When the angel Gabriel visited Mary to announce the birth of Jesus she was a virgin betrothed to Joseph. Betrothal lasted for a year and was as binding as marriage. It could only be dissolved by divorce. If a betrothed man was to die, the girl would be referred to by law as a 'virgin who is a widow'. Luke is the only New Testament writer to mention the virgin birth.

Zechariah

Luke's account of the announcement to Mary immediately follows the story of the priest Zechariah. He was also visited by an angel and told of an unexpected and extraordinary birth (see Luke 1: 5-25). On each occasion the expected child is given a name, a sign of a special relationship with God.

'Let what you have said be done to me'

The stories are dramatically different with regard to the final response. Zechariah was unable to believe the message the angel brought to him immediately. Mary, however, despite her lack of understanding, welcomed God's word and committed herself to it. By her openness to the Spirit of God, Mary is an example of Luke's model of discipleship.

