

## Christmas 2006

### Notes for Commentators on the Midnight Mass in St. Peter's Basilica

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The two large tapestries hanging from the pillars behind the altar represent the mysteries of the Incarnation: the Annunciation and the Nativity.

On a table in front of the altar at the end of the central nave, there is a figure of the Christ child and behind it rests the Book of the Gospels: the Gospel is the Word of God and Jesus is the Word of God made flesh.

The little throne on which the Gospel Book rests is the same one used during the First Vatican Council and the Second Vatican Council for the public display of the Scriptures.

The Gospel Book is an identical reproduction of the "Roman Missal of the Nativity of the Lord" used by Pope Alexander VI (1492-1505) and kept in the Vatican Library collection.

The Entrance Antiphon is from Psalm 2, proclaiming the news of the Messiah, Son of God. Note the refrain: "The Lord said to me: 'You are my son; this day I have begotten you'".

After the Holy Father's Opening Prayer, the singing of the "Kalends" begins, announcing the birth of the Savior as the fulfillment of human and salvation history.

There is no Penitential Rite (Kyrie). After the announcement of the Savior's birth, the Gloria is immediately chanted.

During the Gloria, the floral homage on the part of 12 children in traditional dress representing various countries and continents takes place. (12 is a symbolic number which signifies totality: all peoples of the world). The children will come from the back of the nave bringing bouquets of flowers in hand and placing them around the figure of the Christ child. During all this time, while the Gloria is sung, the bells of St. Peter's will be rung.

During the Creed, at the words: "And became man", all kneel in adoration of the Mystery of the Incarnation (this also takes place on March 25<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Annunciation).

During the Offertory procession, some or all of the children who took part in the floral homage usually bring the gifts for the Eucharist.

At the Eucharistic Prayer (Eucharist Prayer I: Roman Canon) the first four of the Cardinal concelebrants gather near the Pope.

At the end of the celebration, after the Blessing, usually the liturgical procession gathers at the Nativity Scene in the Basilica, going from the central nave and then turning left towards the Presentation Chapel (where St. Pius X is buried) where the Nativity Scene is located. The two deacons take the figure of the Christ child and the Gospel Book which were in front of the altar during the Mass and they bring them in procession. The figure of the Christ child is placed in the creche. The scene is incensed and then the procession exits to the Sacristy.

Regarding the Nativity Scene in the Basilica, its history can be found in the Notes in the Vatican Radio documentation given at the briefing for commentators.

The Nativity Scene figures are the work of the German sculptor Heinrich Zuentherer from Oberammergau, made and donated to Pope John Paul II from 1985-1986.