

## **Introduction**

On this Christmas morning, the people of God gather to celebrate the birth of the Word made flesh, Christ our Lord. Luke recounts the familiar story of shepherds and angels; John's gospel tells of the Word that dwells among us, full of grace and truth. The meaning of Christmas is made clear: the light shines in the darkness. It is in the liturgy that we encounter the Word made flesh – in the people of God gathered together as the body of Christ, and in the meal around the holy table. We go forth to be bearers of light as we proclaim this good news to all the ends of the earth.

## **Prayer of the Day**

God of all, you gave us your only Son to take on our human nature and to illumine the world with your light. By your grace adopt us as your children and enlighten us with your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## **First Reading: Isaiah 52:7-10**

*A messenger races home to Jerusalem with the marvelous words: "Your God reigns!" In comforting the people, God proves to be the best brother or sister (redeemer) they have ever known. Everyone will witness the victory (salvation) of God.*

<sup>7</sup> How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,  
who brings good news,  
who announces salvation,  
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'

<sup>8</sup> Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,  
together they sing for joy;  
for in plain sight they see  
the return of the Lord to Zion.

<sup>9</sup> Break forth together into singing,  
you ruins of Jerusalem;  
for the Lord has comforted his people,  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup> The Lord has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations;  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God.

## Psalm 98

<sup>1</sup> O sing to the Lord a new song,  
for he has done marvellous things.

His right hand and his holy arm  
have gained him victory.

<sup>2</sup> The Lord has made known his victory;  
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

<sup>3</sup> He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness  
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen  
the victory of our God.

<sup>4</sup> Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

<sup>5</sup> Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.

<sup>6</sup> With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
the world and those who live in it.

<sup>8</sup> Let the floods clap their hands;  
let the hills sing together for joy

<sup>9</sup> at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming  
to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with equity.

## Second Reading: Hebrews 1:1-4 [5-12]

*This letter opens with a lofty declaration of Jesus' preeminent status as the Son through whom God created the world and through whom our sins are cleansed. God speaks to us now through the Son, who is exalted even above the angels.*

<sup>1</sup>Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. <sup>3</sup>He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. [

<sup>5</sup>For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son;

today I have begotten you”?

Or again,

“I will be his Father,

and he will be my Son”?

<sup>6</sup>And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God's angels worship him.”

<sup>7</sup>Of the angels he says,

“He makes his angels winds,

and his servants flames of fire.”

<sup>8</sup>But of the Son he says,

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,

and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom.

<sup>9</sup>You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;

therefore God, your God, has anointed you

with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

<sup>10</sup>And,

“In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,

and the heavens are the work of your hands;

<sup>11</sup>they will perish, but you remain;

they will all wear out like clothing;

<sup>12</sup>like a cloak you will roll them up,

and like clothing they will be changed.

But you are the same,

and your years will never end.”

## **Gospel Reading: John 1:1-14**

*The prologue to the Gospel of John describes Jesus as the Word of God made flesh, the one who reveals God to be "full of grace and truth."*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

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## Prayers of Intercession

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need, saying “Hear us, O God,” and responding, “your mercy is great.”

*A brief silence.*

God of glory, you bring your word to birth among us. As you spoke through prophets and ancestors, empower your church to proclaim your name with boldness and tenderness, that your salvation is revealed to all the ends of the earth. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You founded the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands. Protect the beauty of mountains and valleys. Save glaciers, tundra, and arctic lands from the threat of changing climates. Sustain all things by your powerful word. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You send messengers to announce peace. Build trust among nations. Strengthen relationships that reach beyond borders. Grant safety to all who travel across the world, and we are particularly mindful of relief workers, and health care providers. Reveal your redemption through their work. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You bring hope to all people. Bring wholeness to all who long for your comfort and companionship. Revive aching spirits and restore tired bodies. Bring healing and wholeness to all who long for mercy (*especially those who we name now, either silently on our hearts, or aloud... [pause]*). Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You are the fullness of grace and truth. Bless ministries of generosity in this congregation and community. Open our doors in welcome, extend our tables to guests, and send us out with provisions for those who lack food, water, shelter, clothing, or companionship. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. Claim us as your children in this life and in the next. Encourage us by the witness of the saints across the ages who have testified to your light and life. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

## ***A reflection for Christmas Day...***

### A Place at the Stable

Each Christmas many people make the trek “home” to friends and family—with all its wonders and challenges. Some travel great distances and others a few miles to experience a sense of connection and “being counted.” Joseph makes this journey with Mary, to be counted among his tribe for the government. Rather than a warm reception, a rich meal, or an extra bedroom, Joseph and Mary are dislocated and relegated to a stable. Yet it is precisely here that the great home-coming takes place. In the stable Jesus arrives and what began as an order of the Roman Empire becomes the in-breaking realm of God. The sense of family expands as shepherds, perhaps without place or family to be counted, enter. And, as the writer of Titus shares, through the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior, we see ourselves in the presence of God’s home-coming as heirs. No matter who we are or the journey traveled, the promise through this infant in Bethlehem is that we are called “The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord” (Isa. 62:12) and welcomed to God’s in-dwelling in the creation.

Christmas day calls each of us to experience home in a new or unique way, particularly God’s home among us and our place in the story. We come home not merely to a biological or created family, but take our place in the unfolding story of God. With the nervous parents, the smelly shepherds, and the chorus of messengers, we come to the stable where there is a place for each of us to again experience God’s overarching love and promise.

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