

Saturday, December 24, 2022 – Christmas Eve

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Introduction

In winter's deepest night, we welcome the light of the Christ child. Isaiah declares that the light of the long-promised king will illumine the world and bring endless peace and justice. Paul reminds us that the grace of God through Jesus Christ brings salvation to all people. The angels declare that Jesus' birth is good and joyful news for everyone, including lowly shepherds. Filled with the light that shines in our lives, we go forth to share the light of Christ with the whole world.

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that hinders our faith, that eagerly we may receive your promises, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

This poem promises deliverance from Assyrian oppression, a hope based on the birth of a royal child with a name full of promise. While Judah's king will practice justice and righteousness, the real basis for faith lies in God's passion for the people: The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!

²The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Psalm 96

¹Sing to the LORD | a new song;
sing to the LORD, | all the earth.

²**Sing to the LORD, bless the name | of the LORD;
proclaim God's salvation from | day to day.**

³Declare God's glory a- | mong the nations
and God's wonders a- | mong all peoples.

⁴**For great is the LORD and greatly | to be praised,
more to be feared | than all gods.**

⁵As for all the gods of the nations, they | are but idols;
but you, O LORD, have | made the heavens.

⁶**Majesty and magnificence are | in your presence;
power and splendor are in your | sanctuary.**

⁷Ascribe to the LORD, you families | of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD hon- | or and power.

⁸**Ascribe to the LORD the honor due the | holy name;
bring offerings and enter the courts | of the LORD.**

⁹Worship the LORD in the beau- | ty of holiness;
tremble before the LORD, | all the earth.

¹⁰**Tell it out among the nations: "The | LORD is king!
The one who made the world so firm that it cannot be moved will judge the peo- |
ples with equity."**

¹¹Let the heavens rejoice, and let the | earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it; let the field be joyful and all that | is therein.

¹²**Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy at your com- | ing, O LORD,
for you come to | judge the earth.**

¹³You will judge the | world with righteousness
and the peoples | with your truth.

Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14

The appearance of God's grace in Jesus Christ brings salvation for all humanity. Consequently, in the present we live wisely and justly while also anticipating the hope of our Savior's final appearance.

¹¹The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹²training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Gospel: Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

God's greatest gift comes as a baby in a manger. Angels announce the "good news of great joy" and proclaim God's blessing of peace.

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

[¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.]

Prayers of Intercession

With wonder and thanksgiving for Christ's coming into the world, we pray for the church, the life of the earth, and the whole human family.

A brief silence.

Your infinite love is born to us this night. With choirs of angels the church proclaims the good news. Send us out as messengers of the hope that has come to all people. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

You are pleased to dwell with your creatures and the whole earth sings for joy. Renew the splendor of creation from the smallest cell to the widest galaxies. Guide us to be wise stewards of your gifts for the sake of generations to come. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Your authority is over the nations. Break the rod of oppression in every land and free all people from fear. Bring peace where there is war, compassion where there is suffering, and healing where there is disease (*regions in crisis may be named*). God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

You cherish those who are most vulnerable. Protect infants and children, and bless those who care for them. Watch over women giving birth, attend the dying, and relieve any who are in pain (*especially*). Shelter refugee families and those who have no home. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Your lovingkindness embraces everyone in need. Help any for whom this season is lonely or joyless. Comfort those among us, or known to us, who are experiencing distress of body or mind, missing loved ones, or grieving (*especially*). God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

You welcome those who have died into the joyous light of glory. We give thanks for the saints of every time and place who have praised you with lives of faith and humility. Inspire us by their example to love you by serving others. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Pondering the mystery of eternal love made flesh in Christ Jesus, we commend all for whom we pray to the mercy of God.

Amen.

A reflection for this Christmas Eve...

Glory Enough for Everyone

To maintain the machinery of empire, people must be counted; not to be valued as individuals, but to assess tribute. It is the census. Lists of family members, and decisions about them, must be made. As your life, family, and records are audited, so also is your future decided. What sacrifice will be required for the glory of Rome?

If he has listened to Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55), Joseph, as the state-recognized head of the household, can safely allow himself and his family to be among the counted. He would know that Imperial Rome's time is short, that God brings down the "powerful from their thrones" and "sends the rich away empty." Although in temporary bondage, God's people will receive the promises made to Abraham for the sake of his descendants. If Joseph has listened to Mary (Luke 1:32-33) he knows that this son will sit on David's throne, and cannot be removed. He may not understand how and when these things will come to pass, only that they will. Why not be counted?

Shepherds, however, cannot expect to be counted. While the rest of the world is engaged in the games of empire, they watched their flocks, unnoticed by census-takers. But they were not unnoticed by God. Beyond the view of the watchful eye of Caesar, God was doing a new thing, forging true peace to upset the sham *pax* of imperial domination, a new kingdom whose only army is that of angels singing, rank upon rank, of God's saving work. It all begins with the unforeseen birth of a child and the wonder of a mother. We, like shepherds, stand in awe at God's gracious surprise. There is glory enough for all.

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