

Introduction

As on the first day of creation, on this Christmas Day the Word illumines the world, shining forth to bring all things into being. Today we celebrate the incarnate Word, God becoming flesh to live among us in the person of Jesus Christ then and now. Emboldened by the good news of Christ's birth, along with the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and all witnesses to the light of Christ, we declare to the world that we have indeed seen and been transformed by the arrival of "the salvation of our God." O come, let us adore!

Prayer of the Day

All-powerful and unseen God, the coming of your light into our world has brightened weary hearts with peace. Call us out of darkness, and empower us to proclaim the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 62:6-12

The prophet invites the people to give God no rest until God reestablishes Jerusalem. In turn, they will receive names full of promise: The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD, A City Not Forsaken.

⁶Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,
I have posted sentinels;
all day and all night
they shall never be silent.

You who remind the LORD,
take no rest,

⁷and give him no rest
until he establishes Jerusalem
and makes it renowned throughout the earth.

⁸The LORD has sworn by his right hand
and by his mighty arm:

I will not again give your grain
to be food for your enemies,
and foreigners shall not drink the wine
for which you have labored;

⁹but those who garner it shall eat it
and praise the LORD,
and those who gather it shall drink it
in my holy courts.

¹⁰Go through, go through the gates,
prepare the way for the people;

build up, build up the highway,
clear it of stones,
lift up an ensign over the peoples.

¹¹The LORD has proclaimed
to the end of the earth:

Say to daughter Zion,
“See, your salvation comes;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.”

¹²They shall be called, “The Holy People,
The Redeemed of the LORD“;
and you shall be called, “Sought Out,
A City Not Forsaken.”

Psalm 97

¹The LORD reigns; let the | earth rejoice;
let the multitude of the | isles be glad.

²**Clouds and darkness sur- | round the LORD,
righteousness and justice are the foundations | of God’s throne.**

³Fire goes be- | fore the LORD,
burning up enemies on | every side.

⁴**Lightnings light | up the world;
the earth | sees and trembles.**

⁵The mountains | melt like wax
before the Lord of | all the earth.

⁶**The heavens declare your righteous- | ness, O LORD,
and all the peoples | see your glory.**

⁷Confounded be all who worship carved images and delight | in false gods!
Bow down before the LORD, | all you gods.

⁸**Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Ju- | dah rejoice,
because of your judg- | ments, O LORD.**

⁹For you are the LORD, most high over | all the earth;
you are exalted far a- | bove all gods.

¹⁰**You who love the | LORD, hate evil!
God guards the lives of the saints and rescues them from the hand | of the wicked.**

¹¹Light dawns | for the righteous,
and joy for the hon- | est of heart.

¹²**Rejoice in the | LORD, you righteous,
and give thanks to God’s | holy name.**

Second Reading: Titus 3:4-7

God saves us not because of what we do. Rather, God is a God of mercy and salvation who graciously cleanses us in baptism and renews our lives through the Holy Spirit.

⁴When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Gospel Reading: Luke 2: 8-20

The world's deep night is shattered by the light of God's new day. The glory of God is revealed to poor shepherds, who share the good news with others.

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

Joining our voices with the heavenly host and Christians throughout time and space, let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need, saying “Merciful God,” and responding, “hear our prayer.”

A brief silence.

Your Spirit calls your church to rejoice in Christ’s birth. As we gather at the manger, help us see your face in all babies needing comfort and care. Equip the church in the nurture and encouragement of all children. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

The rocks and streams proclaim your praise. Attune us to the joyful sounds and groaning of your creation. Stir us to tend the earth wisely, that the whole earth may dwell in abundance and peace. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Your messengers declare your joy to the world. Embolden leaders and nations to make your justice and peace known throughout the earth. Uphold justice advocates and social service providers who risk their safety to help others. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You choose those regarded as lowly to tell the good news of your love. Pour out your mercy and care on all who are sick, grieving, struggling, and the elderly who live alone (*especially*). Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You abide with your people in times of trouble. Accompany families and children who have nowhere to turn. Strengthen this congregation and local ministries in their care for those fleeing danger, abuse, or neglect. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Your grace and mercy extend to all. Give comfort to those who mourn, and assure them of the peace you have granted those who have gone before us. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Rejoicing in your Word made flesh among us, we commend these prayers to you, confident of your grace and love made known to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

A reflection for Christmas Day..

For Us and for Our Salvation

If the Christmas (I and II) gospels from Luke are all about the invisible God made visible in the flesh of the baby of Bethlehem, the Christmas (III) gospel from John is about the cosmic Christ who was present before the birth of the whole world.

The prologue to the Gospel of John is creed. It is faith claims. It is poetry, really, and it moves us into that space of belief, beyond what we can see. It is a set of beliefs that are absolutely theological in their composition, beyond history and fact-checking. It is the opposite of those shows cropping up on the History Channel that offer hour-long investigations of whether or not there was a star in the sky, as scripture reports, in the year of Jesus' birth; or whether or not there is any record of Herod's slaughter of the holy innocents; or what Jesus' face would have looked like.

The gospel moves from faith claims about the preexisting Word that undergird our creeds to a story located in history beginning, not with Jesus, but with John the Baptist. It moves from the creation of the world to the re-creation of the human being that takes place in baptism. Ultimately, John's prologue makes faith claims not only about God, about Jesus as the preexisting logos, but about us as well. The beginning of the story is not just Jesus born in the stable in Bethlehem, it is us reborn as children of God at baptism. This is why we retell the story of our faith using the words of the creed each time an infant or an adult is brought to the font, because we believe that on Christmas something happened for us, and for our salvation.

Christ is born this day in you, in us, in the church. We have seen it, in ourselves, in one another, in the world. The God who has existed since before the story of time began has entered into history again this morning to remake us all, to give us new life, light for all people that cannot be overcome.

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