

Monday, December 25, 2023 – The Nativity of Our Lord II: Christmas Day

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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 Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

First Reading: Isaiah 62:6-12

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 ^l earth rejoice;
let the multitude of the ^l isles be glad.
²**Clouds and darkness sur- ^l round the LORD,
righteousness and justice are the foundations ^l of God’s throne.**
³Fire goes be- ^l fore the LORD,
burning up enemies on ^l every side.
⁴**Lightnings light ^l up the world;
the earth ^l sees and trembles.**
⁵The mountains ^l melt like wax
before the Lord of ^l all the earth.
⁶**The heavens declare your righteous- ^l ness, O LORD,
and all the peoples ^l see your glory.**
⁷Confounded be all who worship carved images and delight ^l in false gods!
Bow down before the LORD, ^l all you gods.
⁸**Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Ju- ^l dah rejoice,
because of your judg- ^l ments, O LORD.**
⁹For you are the LORD, most high over ^l all the earth;
you are exalted far a- ^l bove all gods.
¹⁰**You who love the ^l LORD, hate evil!
God guards the lives of the saints and rescues them from the hand ^l of the wicked. R**
¹¹Light dawns ^l for the righteous,
and joy for the hon- ^l est of heart.
¹²**Rejoice in the ^l LORD, you righteous,
and give thanks to God’s ^l holy name.**

Second Reading: Titus 3:4-7

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: Luke 2:[1-7] 8-20

[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

Trusting in God's good news of great joy for all people, we offer our prayers for ourselves, our neighbors, and the world God loves.

A brief silence.

Christ is born and your Spirit is poured out upon us. Renew your church through the gift of baptism. Unite your faithful people across both distance and denomination. Teach us to live by your grace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You reveal your presence over the heights of the mountains, through the cloud and lightning, and beyond the trembling of the earth. Still the storms that threaten the lands and send relief to all places and peoples experiencing natural disasters, extreme temperatures, or famine. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Let all the ends of the earth know the promise of your reconciliation and renewal. Make beautiful the work of peacemakers, community organizers, and advocates who work to ensure that all people flourish in safety and dignity (*especially*). Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God, be our comfort and our redemption. Seek out all who feel forsaken or forlorn, especially those who are marginalized because of their race, sexuality, gender expression, or immigration status. Heal all who struggle in any way (*especially*). Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Following the example of Mary and Joseph, let all our families, whatever their shape or size, reflect your holy and life-giving love. Bless adoptive families, foster families, and guardians. Hold in mercy all who are childless, by choice or by life circumstance. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

As you have guarded the lives of the saints, so shield us from evil and danger. Teach us by their example to serve you with joy and honesty of heart, that we live as heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Abide with us, O God of mercy, and receive our prayers according to your abundant grace.

Amen.

A reflection for this 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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