

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

2 Samuel 7 : 1-5, 8-11, 16

King David is told that God is content to dwell in the humblest of places. God has always been present., leading and guiding, and can always be trusted to guide and bless. Much of Jewish hope rested on the promise of a king like David, to be born of his line.

Acts 13 : 16-26

Paul was invited to speak at a synagogue in Galatia. His Jewish audience heard him briefly review their history under God, and the promise of a Davidic King. The way was prepared, he says; now - to us - Jesus our Saviour has come.

Luke 1 : 67-79

Now the hope of centuries is satisfied, and there is nothing left but praise - the praise of old Zechariah whose own son John will usher into the world the one who is the light of the world.

See also Christmas Day resources on this site for introductions to other sets of christmas readings, for sermon links and children's talks.

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

O God,
who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance
of the birth of thy only Son Jesus Christ;
Grant that, as we joyfully receive him for our Redeemer,
so we may with sure confidence,
behold him when he shall come to be our Judge,
who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit,
one God, world without end.

Collect Two

Almighty God,
you make us glad with the yearly remembrance
of the birth of your Son Jesus Christ:
Grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer,
we may with sure confidence behold him
when he shall come to be our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

The Nativity of our Lord (Night)

Collect One

O God,
who madest this most holy night
to shine with the brightness of his coming,

who is the light of the world;
Grant that we who on earth hail the brightness of his appearing
may rejoice hereafter in the light of his heavenly glory;
who with thee and the Holy Spirit,
liveth and reigneth, one God, now and for ever.

Collect Two

Eternal God,
who made this most holy night
to shine with the brightness of your one true light:
Bring us, who have known the revelation
of that light on earth,
to see the radiance of your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

In holy joy, we bow at the manger of the Christ Child and offer our prayers
and thanksgivings saying, "Lord, in your mercy," and responding, "Hear our
prayer."

Jesus, splendour of the Father, born of the virgin Mary, come in your gentleness
and rule your Church. Smile on our bishop _____,
and all the clergy and the faithful who are awaiting great and abundant blessing,
Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer!

Jesus, Prince of peace, friend of all, our refuge, grant light to the nations and
wisdom to the leaders of the nations that all may live peaceful and secure lives and
that your universal Church may prosper.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer!

Jesus, brother of the poor, treasure of the faithful, as we celebrate the feast of
your birth, open our hearts to one another. May there be a place at the table of your
generosity for all.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer!

Jesus, joy of the angels, light of all witnesses to the truth, crown of the saints,
care for those who suffer illness, are facing death and are longing for your face, and
those who mourn _____.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer!

Jesus, Good Shepherd, true light, boundless love, grant us peace to share with
one another as sisters and brothers in you, consecrating our lives to your praise and
to serving our neighbours.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer!

Jesus, Son of the living God, may all our desires find fulfillment in you, be our strength and our song. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

As we join the angels and celebrate with joy the birth of the Son of God, let us offer prayers to God who gives new birth to sons and daughters in every place.

By the birth of the timeless Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For all believers who put their trust in the incarnate Son of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority, and for peace and justice.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For the conversion of the whole human race to our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, for those in prison, and for the dying and the dead.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

Remembering our most glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Source of light and gladness, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast. May we grow in Jesus Christ who unites our lives to yours and who is Lord for all eternity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

POST COMMUNION

God for whom we wait,
you feed us with the bread of eternal life:
Keep us ever watchful, that we may be ready
to stand before the Son of Man, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Nativity of our Lord (Night)

God our Father,
in this night you have made known to us again
the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:
Confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him
until the day dawns
and Christ the Morning Star rises in our hearts.
To him be glory both now and for ever.

PRAYERS

See Christmas Day and the Parish Resource packs on Prayer and christmas on this site.

LECTIONARY NOTES

2 Samuel 7 : 1-5, 8-11, 16

Prior to this text, Jerusalem had been established as a political and military centre under the leadership of David. The king had built himself a palace in Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:11) and ruled from there. After considerable difficulties and delays, David finally brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, and placed it in a tent he had constructed (2 Sam 6:17). The Book of Chronicles identifies the location of the tent as Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39), which was about 8 km north west of Jerusalem. Up to this time the text tells us that the Lord had dwelt only 'in a tent and in a tabernacle' (2 Sam 7:6). But David has other plans and in today's reading turns his attention to building a temple in Jerusalem, a permanent location for worship of Israel's God, Yahweh.

David first approaches the prophet Nathan to get some advice on his plans. His pitch to the prophet sounds humble enough: 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.' (2 Sam 7:2) At first, David receives approval from the prophet Nathan (v. 3) but during the night a subsequent message comes from the Lord through the prophet which changes the plans. In the divine speech, conveyed by Nathan, several things are pointed out. First, the Lord has not lived in a 'house' since he brought the people of Israel out of Egypt (vv. 5-7). This passage is not just about the graciousness of the Lord in not demanding a suitable dwelling. Rather, it makes the central point that this God of Israel is one whose very nature is to be 'on the move' and to be calling his people to follow. He has travelled with them out of a place of captivity to one where they can dwell secure (cf. v. 10). This is a God who travels with his people and whose sanctuary, the symbol of his presence, is not one which radiates permanence and fixity, but pilgrimage and journey.

Secondly, just as the Lord has delivered his people and been with them so he has been with David from the time of his following the sheep, through the difficulties of dealing with his enemies, right up to the time when he promises to make a great name for David, that is establish his reputation and dynasty (vv. 8-9). Finally, just as the Lord has made a place of safety for his people, so he will establish rest for David. He will create a 'house' for David. There is a clever play on words going on here around the common word, 'house', for it can mean both a building and a family, or in David's case, a royal dynasty. The word 'house' can also be used to refer to a temple, which is of course the 'house' David was intending to build for the Lord (cf. vv. 2, 5). Beyond the play on words, the emphasis in the text is clearly not upon the establishment of a place for God as much as upon the settlement and peace established by God for Israel and David.

To this is added in vv. 11b-14a a promise that the Lord will establish David's descendant on his throne. This is the beginning of the dynasty. The passage even goes on beyond today's assigned reading to spell out that should David's descendant transgress, the Lord will not forego his promise. The permanency of the dynasty is divinely assured. The final part of the chapter develops the theme of the covenant established between the Lord and the house of David (cf. Psalm 89 which is set for today). Of course, the editors of the text knew what would later happen as they looked back on David's reign, recording and reshaping that ancient tradition. They knew that David's dynasty would endure for some

400 years. They also knew that Solomon would be the one to build a temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5-7) and the promise of the Lord makes this specific reference (2 Sam 7:13).

While the story has its own points to make, such as the presence of a God who goes with his people on their journey and whose chief concern is their security and rest not his own, we should be aware of the implications that lie beyond the surface of the text. The contrast between the tent or tabernacle that had been the Lord's 'house' since the Exodus, and the house that David envisages for the Lord – like his own a house of cedar and the best materials – should not be dismissed too quickly. Hidden in that contrast are tremendous theological, political and social issues.

What David was proposing was nothing short of a major upheaval to the way people understood the God of Israel and the way power was distributed within the society. The permanence of a temple structure stood not for a God who travelled with his people on their journey, but one who expected his people to come to him. The 'house' Solomon did eventually build for the Lord turned out to be more a private royal chapel than a public building (it was smaller than the royal palace) and was constructed by people conscripted to forced labour (1 Kgs 5:13). All of this placed the royal 'house' in a prominent position over the people and firmly supported by the religious structures. The Lord was now accessible only through those royal structures. Such a change was far from the image of a deity who dwelt in the less impressive dwelling of a tent implying one who moved with and ahead of the people themselves. Of course, the more permanent structure was to come to be in time, along with the social changes implied in it. But the message of the prophet Nathan to David suggests that as with the adoption of the institution of kingship itself (1 Sam 8-12), there was a lot of debate over these momentous changes before they were ever adopted. Maybe the upshot of 2 Samuel 7 is that David proved a more astute politician than his son after him and did not force radical change upon his people before they were willing to accept it.

Acts 13 : 16-26

I. Background to Understand Acts 13

The passage is illuminating for a number of reasons. It is Paul's first sermon or proclamation of the Apostolic message, and so we see what might be called the "completion" of his conversion, which began in ch. 9. Second, we discover through studying Paul's sermon that there is a continuity in the Apostolic preaching. This theme is important for Luke, since he has a major theological and practical problem on his hands: how to explain the legitimacy of a Gentile ministry when Jesus was a Jew and was, apparently, sent primarily to Jews. Paul is the "link" or "hinge" figure in Luke's mind, a figure who can reach back to the very Jewishness of the early Christian message but who also has the insight on how to make the message attractive also to Gentiles. Thus, I will show below how Paul's message in Acts 13 fits together theologically with the preaching in Acts 2 and 3.

Third, Luke skillfully shows, in the passage just before this one (13: 4-12), that the new message spoken by Paul 'works' in the Hellenistic/Roman world but the new message is to be distinguished from magic. That is, one of the allegations that could have been brought against the early Christians was that the power available to them by the "Holy Spirit" was nothing other than a magical display. The fact, for example, that infirm people desperately tried to have Peter's shadow fall on them (Acts 5:15) sounds like someone thought of the

Apostolic power in a magical way. But in 13:9 (and 19:11-20), Luke takes pains to differentiate the early Christian healings/speech from magic. The early Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit and enabled to preach a message of salvation and not just do wondrous works.

Finally, we have in this passage an insight into the problems and operation of the earliest Christian mission. Barnabas and Saul (13:2, note the order and the names--Saul only becomes Paul in 13:9) were set apart by the laying on of hands in a congregation they had founded in Antioch on the Lebanon coast just north of Palestine. They apparently were "resident" Apostles or leaders, but then the Holy Spirit, who is considered an active and communicative force by Luke, directs the congregation to send Barnabas and Saul on mission. They are accompanied by John Mark, but he soon leaves them (13:13). Later on Luke tells us that he "deserted" them (15:38), so we see that all was not hunky-dory for the first Christian missionaries. Nevertheless, they arrive in another Antioch, this one in Southern Turkey, a long (100 mile) hike in from the South Turkey (ancient Cilicia) coast where they had landed. It is here, in Paul's "home country," that Paul delivers his first sermon.

II. Paul's Message and Response

It is interesting that Luke is thinking about his portrait of Paul in this first missionary speech, because he has Paul address the Jewish congregation like a Hellenistic orator rather than a Jewish rabbi. That is, in v. 16, Paul stands up and gives a gesture of the hands before beginning to speak. We know even from earlier in Luke-Acts (Luke 4:21) that when a synagogue speaker delivered a message, he sat and spoke. But Luke is aware that even though Paul is speaking to a Jewish audience, he will be moving into "Graeco-Roman" realities, and so he portrays Paul with a sort of Ciceronian style--standing with dramatic gestures.

But even if this is true, Paul's message is both Scriptural and designed to show the connection with the earliest Apostolic preaching in Acts 2 and 3. If Luke can show this continuity, he has justified Paul's Gentile mission as the "natural outgrowth" or, better said, the "Spirit-directed outgrowth" of the earliest preaching. Three points of continuity with earlier preaching are: (1) the innocence of Jesus; (2) the ignorance of the people; and (3) the use of the royal Psalms (in Acts 13 it is Ps. 2; in Acts 2 it is Ps. 110), originally associated with David, to show Jesus' superiority to his great forebear. One might think that the "innocence" of Jesus is a "no-brainer," but because there were so many topics that could have occupied the earliest preachers, this one is important. "Even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed" (13:28). Though Jesus' innocence isn't explicitly mentioned in Acts 2 or 3, the fact that Pilate decided to release him (3:13) harks back to Pilate's portrayal in Luke, where he decides Jesus is innocent (Lk. 23:4).

Second is the ignorance of the hearers. This is an interesting point because one could easily have drawn from the Gospel accounts the sense of a conniving or evil-directed opposition to Jesus. Yet, Paul preaches a sort of "softer" culpability: "Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize him or understand the words of the prophets..." (13:27). Peter earlier had said: "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers" (3:17). Luke uses the same Greek word (agnoia) to express the idea.

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Finally, and most significant, Luke has both Peter and Paul wrestle with the royal Psalms in their preaching: Psalms 2 and 110. Those Psalms provided a tremendously rich "treasure trove" for early Christian interpreters. Psalm 2, in our passage, presents both a picture of frustration of secular kings as they assail the Lord and the Lord's anointed as well as the triumph of God by setting God's "Son" on his throne/holy hill. Paul picks up on Psalm 2 in his Antiochene sermon (13:33). In fact, so that we won't miss it, Luke has Paul say that it is written "in the second psalm." The verse "You are my Son; today I have begotten you," was also quoted in with a different ending ("with you I am well-pleased") in Jesus' baptism (Lk. 3:21). Thus, for Luke, this passage from Ps. 2 had some "elasticity" in it; it could be used both to explain the inauguration of Jesus' ministry as well as his resurrection. Peter makes use of Ps. 110 in Acts 2:34: "The Lord says to my Lord,/ 'Sit at my right hand/ until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Thus, the Davidic character of Jesus is at the heart of the Apostolic preaching. But, in both cases, someone greater than David is here, the one who bears the title Son in an eternal way.

Conclusion

Much more could be said about this passage. For example, the long discussion on "corruption" in 13:34-37 is an example of how early Christian preaching both honored David and wanted to distinguish him from Christ--on the basis of Christ's resurrection. Then there is the reaction of the Jews in v. 45. Since Paul spoken in a synagogue to Jews, the Jews of v. 45 might have been a sort of contingent of opposition-speakers, organized to try to rebut this new and "dangerous" expression of Judaism. In any case, we are thrown into a world that is both strange and contentious, one that is "ours" to the extent that we are the spiritual descendants of these first preachers. Our message stays the same, even if the opponents (magic and the Jews) have changed.

Luke 1 : 67-79

Verse 67

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying.
Prophesied ...

This word, as used in the New Testament, is not limited in meaning to the mere prediction of future events. Paul, a close friend of Luke, said, "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men edification, exhortation, and consolation" ([1 Corinthians 14:3](#)). Of course, the foretelling of the future is also part of the meaning.

Filled with the Holy Spirit ...

The inspiration and infallible accuracy of what Zacharias said in this circumstance is affirmed by such a declaration as this.

THE BENEDICTUS

The twelve verses recording Zacharias' words could be briefly summarized as a thanksgiving for the arrival of the times of the Messiah. It was God's blessing and mercy manifested by his fulfilling at last the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament, his breaking the centuries of silence after Malachi, and his establishing the promised reality of the covenant with Abraham that dominated the major part of Zacharias' prophecy. Not until the last four verses did he speak of his precious son and the share he would have in such a glorious fulfillment of God's word.

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Like the Magnificat, this portion of Luke has been used extensively in the liturgies of the historical church; like the Virgin's Hymn, this too was first adopted for liturgical use by St. Caesarius of Arles in the sixth century.

Verses 68, 69

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people. And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. Here Zacharias was speaking, not of his own son John, but of Jesus the Christ. The use of the past tense, at a time when Jesus had not yet been born, is prophetic, a tense peculiar to the Holy Scriptures, in which future events are announced in the past tense, implying the certainty of fulfillment. What God promises is as certain as if it had already happened.

Horn of salvation ...

This metaphor was one which, to the Israelites, suggested the very greatest strength. Such men as Abraham and Moses were said to be "horns" of Israel.

In the house of his servant David ...

This, like the words of the angel ([Luke 1:32](#)), shows that Mary was a descendent of David.

Meditation: Does the proclamation of the gospel fill you with joy and hope? When the Lord comes to redeem us he fills us with his Holy Spirit, the source of our joy and hope in the promises of God. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, blessed the Lord and prophesied the work of redemption that was to be accomplished by the Messiah. In sending the Messiah God has made a gracious visit to his people to redeem them. This was the mission for which Jesus Christ was sent into the world — to redeem those sold for sin and sold under sin. In the feast of the Incarnation we celebrate the gracious gift of God in sending his only begotten Son to redeem us. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may inspire us and fill us with joy and boldness to proclaim the message of the Lord's visitation and redemption.

"Lord, you have been gracious and merciful towards your people. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may bear witness to the joy of the gospel to those around me."

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES - see Christmas Day