



Although the readings are the same for Christmas every year, it is important to allow the particular cycle to speak and give a different "flavour" to the Christmas celebration. Since we have just entered the year of Luke (Year C), we can bring some of Luke's particular emphases into play in the Christmas celebration. These would include the inclusivity of God's Reign, the high value Jesus places on women, the role of the Holy Spirit and prayer, and the nature of God's Reign as an alternative "kingdom" which subverts the human kingdoms of the time.

May our worship this Christmas lead us deeper into the inclusive Reign of Christ.

INTRODUCTIONS

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

CHRISTMAS DAY - SET I

Isaiah 9 : 2-7

The bible readings in Advent have prepared us to celebrate the coming of the Lord. His people longed for him, and we know the joy of living with him here and now. So, we understand Isaiah's prophecy as greeting the birth of a child whose new kingdom of righteousness will last forever.

Titus 2 : 11-14

The new morning of the world has dawned, says this writer. As we learn how to live in this bright new light, in gratitude for the first coming of Jesus who has made us his own, we await the greater glory when Christ will come again.

Luke 2 : 1-14, 15-20

Luke, the master storyteller, gives us pictures we shall never forget, of the humble birth at Bethlehem of the Saviour of the world, and the shining glory which brought shepherds to worship the Lamb of God.

Readings http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%209:%202-7%0Acw%20Psalm%2096%0ATitus%202:%2011-14%0ALuke%202:%201-14,%2015-20

SET II

Isaiah 62 : 6-12

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The prophet proclaims that the news of God's deliverance will reach every corner of the world, to call all his people back to himself. He will redeem them, and make them his holy ones.

Titus 3 : 4-7

Christ has come to bring a new dawn says this writer. Now we know we are not saved by our good deeds, but by grace alone. The divine mercy makes us heirs of eternal life.

Luke 2 : 1-7, 8-20

Readings http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%2062:%206-12%0Acw%20Psalm%2097%0ATitus%203:%204-7%0ALuke%202:1-7,%208-20

SET III

Isaiah 52 : 7-10

In typical Hebrew style, the prophet sings of a glorious future as if it had already happened. For us, God has indeed visited and redeemed his people, glory to Israel and light for the Gentiles.

Hebrews 1 : 1-4, 5-12

In this anonymous essay, the writer contrasts the partial revelation given in times past with the outpouring of God's word in his glorious son.

John 1 : 1-14

In so few but wonderful words, John captures the majesty and the mystery of God disclosing himself; his divine Word is made flesh. Christ was from the beginning, is now, and all who believe this are children of God.

Readings [http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%2052:7-10%0Acw%20Psalm%2098%0AHebrews%201:%201-4,%20\[5-12\]%0AJohn%201:%201-14,%20\[15-18\]](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%2052:7-10%0Acw%20Psalm%2098%0AHebrews%201:%201-4,%20[5-12]%0AJohn%201:%201-14,%20[15-18])

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

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.

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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.

The Nativity of our Lord (Day)

Collect One

Almighty God,
who hast given us thy only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him,
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin;
Grant that we being regenerate,
and made thy children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit;
through the same our Lord Jesus Christ,
who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit,
ever one God, world without end.

Collect Two

Almighty God,
you have given us your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:
Grant that we, who have been born again
and made your children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1 Night

God of darkness and silence, you have pierced the quiet of this night by the utterance of your Word in our flesh.

May your word of compassion and reconciliation resound in us and through us.

After each petition there may be silence followed by

God of love
grant our prayer.

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God of darkness and silence, you have pierced the quiet of this night by the utterance of your Word in our flesh. May your word of compassion and reconciliation resound in us and through us.

In this holy night angels proclaimed the peace of your unconquered Sun of righteousness. Strengthen all who work for peace and justice.

In this holy night you came to us in a child cradled in a borrowed bed of straw as there was no room in the inn. Open our hearts to the needs of the homeless and the hungry.

In this holy night shepherds and outcasts heard your good news. Give us grace to spread your gospel of joy and liberation.

In this holy night we rejoice at the coming of this time of re-creation. Be with those who travel, enrich our rejoicing, and strengthen the bonds between us.

In this holy night Christians throughout the world are celebrating Christ's birth. Unite us in one family that we may shine with the one light that scatters all our darkness.

In this holy night your living Word leaped down, shedding light on all who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. Give strength and peace to all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit.

In this holy night heaven and earth embrace and in your true child you give us power to be your children. Fulfil in your love all who have gone before us in the faith. May we, like them, remain faithful to the mystery of the Word made flesh and live in your eternal light.

Hear these prayers we bring to you and fulfil your purposes in us in the name of Jesus, your incarnate Word. **Amen.**

- *Bosco Peters*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2 Night

In joy and thanksgiving at Christ's birth,
Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

We pray for all faithful people,
For all welcome messengers of good news,

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

For the nations and their rulers,
For the corporations and their executives,
For anyone with power over the lives of others,

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

For those who defend the helpless,
For those who strive for justice,

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For those who work to find a way to peace,
For all the world, and all who live in it,

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

For anyone suffering, sick, alone, afraid, or in any kind of trouble.
We pray especially for ... *[name those you want to remember today]*.

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

For our own community, for friends, neighbors, and family, near and far.
We pray especially for ... *[name those you want to remember today]*.

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

For those who have died.
We pray especially for ... *[name those you want to remember today]* .

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

We offer thanksgiving for Mary's firstborn Son—
good news of great joy.

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.
Before the eyes of all the nations you sent your Son,
the exact imprint of love itself, to be our salvation.
With the shepherds in the fields,
let us go now to Bethlehem,
there to find Christ in our hearts, and in the world. **Amen.**

~ written by Margaret D. McGee for the Christmas Eve service at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Port Townsend, Washington.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 3 Night

Presider or deacon

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.

Deacon or other leader

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

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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 *N*, and all the saints, let us

offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

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.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

4 Morning/Dawn

Presider or deacon

As we join the shepherds and celebrate with joy the birth of Jesus Christ, let us offer prayers to God who shines the light of Christ on all creation.

Deacon or other leader

By the birth of the Jesus Christ 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.

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

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

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

Presider

Source of light and gladness, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast. May the Rising Sun of Christ spread across the world and brighten all humanity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 5 During the day

Presider or deacon

As we join the whole creation and celebrate with joy the Word made flesh, let us offer prayers to God who dwells among us to the end of time.

Deacon or other leader

By the wedding of the human and divine natures in Christ Jesus.

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 *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Source of grace and truth, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast. May we come to see the true light who shines throughout the world and who is God for all eternity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

POST COMMUNION

The Nativity of our Lord (Night)

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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.

The Nativity of our Lord (Day)

God our Father,
whose Word has come among us
in the Holy Child of Bethlehem:
May the light of faith illumine our hearts
and shine in our words and deeds;
through him who is Christ the Lord.

PRAYERS

O Holy One,
heavenly angels spoke to earthly shepherds
and eternity entered time in the child of Bethlehem.
Through the telling of the Christmas story,
let our temporal lives be caught up in the eternal
in that same child,
that we might join shepherds and all the heavenly host
in praising the coming of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

God of glory,
your splendour shines from a manger in Bethlehem,
where the Light of the world is humbly born
into the darkness of human night.
Open our eyes to Christ's presence in the shadows of our world,
so that we, like him, may become beacons of your justice,
and defenders of all for whom there is no room. Amen.

Light of life, you came in flesh,
born into human pain and joy,
and gave us power to be your children.
Grant us faith, O Christ, to see your presence among us,
so that all of creation may sing new songs of gladness
and walk in the way of peace. Amen.

We bless you, Abba, Father,
for you have visited your people
in one like us in all things but sin,
and in human fragility you have revealed
the face of divinity.
Gather into your arms
all the peoples of the world,
so that in your embrace

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we may find blessing, peace,
and the fullness of our inheritance
as your daughters and sons. Amen.

With the angels of heaven we proclaim your glory, O God.
As the radiance of your presence lights up the heavens,
we pray for enlightenment
for your church on behalf of the whole world.
Grant that, through our prayers,
our lives may radiate the presence of Christ
to all who dwell on earth,
for he is our Lord for ever and ever. Amen.

God of all ages,
in the birth of Christ
your boundless love for your people
shattered the power of darkness.
Be born in us with that same love and light,
that our song may blend with all the choirs of heaven and earth
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

God of love, Father of all,
the darkness that covered the earth
has given way to the bright dawn of your Word made flesh.
Make us a people of this light.
Make us faithful to your Word
that we may bring your life to the waiting world.
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.
International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)

O God, you make us glad
by the yearly festival
of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ:
Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer,
may with sure confidence
behold him when he comes to be our Judge;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.
1979 Book of Common Prayer

Eternal Word,
you became flesh
and dwelt among us,
because of your great love for mankind.
Though you were God,
you humbled yourself
out of love for your creation,
being born in a lowly dwelling,
to a meek and chaste Virgin.
Give us your grace,
to practice humility,
following your example,
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and the example
of your servant and Mother,
the Blessed Virgin Mary. Amen
David Bennett

Almighty God and Father of light,
a child is born to us and a Son is given to us.
Your eternal Word leaped down from heaven
in the silent watches of the night,
and now your Church is filled with wonder
at the nearness of her God.
Open our hearts to receive His life
and increase our vision with the rising of dawn,
that our lives may be filled with His glory and His peace,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)

Almighty God,
who has poured upon us the new light of your Incarnate Word;
grant that the same light enkindled in our hearts
may shine forth in our lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

LECTIONARY NOTES Set I

Isaiah 9:2-7:

- This text is particularly meaningful in the midst of December in this part of the world, with the short days and sometimes seemingly perpetual darkness. It can be overwhelming. Our life without God's light is like a perpetual darkness. But the joy of Christmas is the coming of the light in the Christ-child.
- The coming of the messiah comes as one who frees from oppression and lifts the burden from the downtrodden. Christmas comes to those in desperate need - sometimes we forget that, and think of Christmas as all for us and about us who can't honestly describe ourselves as oppressed.
- "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." What is your name for the messiah? This year in my congregation, we are focusing on the appellation "Prince of Peace" in particular.
- "there shall be endless peace" - what do you think Isaiah means by this? We look around and see that though Christ has come, we haven't experienced endless peace. Are we missing it? Is it yet to come? Do we have to aid in its coming, or does it happen in spite of us? What do you think?
- I think we always have to be careful with light/darkness imagery to make sure we're not interjecting any racist overtones to our language. Obviously light/dark imagery is biblical and helpful in teaching, but we also have to watch out for ways talking about light as good and dark as evil can be hurtful to people of color. Just be mindful.

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Psalm 96:

- The first verses don't distinguish this psalm for me from many others. Praise God, tell of God's salvations. Great is the Lord, greatly to be praised.
- God judges with equity - as a judge is supposed to do. But so often we experience injustice even in the very justice system. God's justice is always - just!
- Vs. 11 is some of the anthropomorphic language often found in Psalms, but I find it effective. Heaven, earth, sea, fields, and all that is in earth is glad for God's rulership. The trees sing. To my mind come images from *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Chronicles of Narnia* with trees who could indeed sing praise.
- We will be judged with God's truth. How do you understand that? With what else are we judged?

Titus 2:11-14:

- Christmas Eve is the only time Titus appears in the lectionary, and I'm guessing people usually don't use the Titus text when we have so much to talk about in Isaiah and Luke. Poor Titus! But there's some good stuff in this short selection.
- "The grace of God has appeared." - I really like this - Grace, something we think of as intangible and invisible, has become tangible, literally touchable, certainly visible, in the coming of the Christ child.
- "bringing salvation to all" - emphasis mine. Salvation is for all.
- "renounce impiety and worldly passions" - what are the 'worldly passions' you need to announce. Instead of a season of joy and abundance, it seems we often make the season instead one of gluttony and selfishness. But here we are called to live lives that are "self-controlled, upright, and godly." What would you have to change to make that true for yourself?
- "zealous for good deeds" - I can try and trick myself all I want, but I know I can't honestly describe myself as one who is zealous for good deeds. Can you? I wish I could though - what a great description for someone.

Luke 2:1-20:

- I find it hard to write notes on this text and give a new look at words so familiar. But we have to look with new eyes and read with new ears, don't we? I find it hard to even preach on this text. Often on Christmas Eve I opt for monologues and drama, to try and let the story come alive. My goal is to try to engage the text in a five-senses sort of way: what do we see, hear, smell, touch, taste? And additionally: what is everyone feeling?
- Mary, of course, is the star here (aside from the baby, obviously.) What does Mary feel? Is she stressed? Exasperated? Scared out of her mind? We don't know the details, but from the story we can't see that there's anyone there to help her through the birthing process except Joseph.
- Why do you think God speaks to the shepherds? We have such warm fuzzy images of shepherds, but we don't really have a feel for the places of shepherd's in Jesus'

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day. Why are they included in the birth? Why not the innkeeper? A priest? Other townsfolk? What do you think the shepherds felt about what they saw (other than terror at the angels?)

- The shepherds told others about the baby Jesus. I wonder what was made of this news - crazy shepherds? Did years later people still wonder about the child? Know that the man Jesus was the baby they'd once heard about?
- "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart." One of my favorite verses in the bible. What a brave, faithful young woman we find pictured in this text.

By Beth Quick

LECTIONARY NOTES Set III

Isaiah 52:7-10:

"beautiful feet" - I've known this verse, though not where to find it in the Bible, since I was in a summer-camp production of "Sandi Patti and the Friendship Company" in junior high, where "Beautiful Feet" was one of the songs. I looked all over for lyrics online, but couldn't find them. Beautiful feet - what a great image! Are your feet beautiful? What message do your feet carry from place to place? Do you bring peace with your feet? Salvation?

Isaiah speaks of the joy of Israel returning back home after exile to Babylon. When have you experienced your most joyful homecoming? When have you been away from home and not wanted to be away from home? Homesick? Without a home?

According to [Chris Haslam](#), the reference to "God's arm" is a reference to God's power. Sort of envisioning a God-flexing-muscles picture.

Psalms 98:

Oof - watch out - there's "God's arm" again, twice on one Sunday!

"Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy." Great imagery. How would you create this image?

This is a psalm of joy and thankfulness for God's action in someone's life, in the life of a whole people. How do you celebrate as an individual? As a community? Do we celebrate as nations? A world? How do we express our joy in God? Through worship? Action?

Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12):

Hebrews talks of Jesus as the reflection of God's glory. I think we are also reflections of God's glory, if we let ourselves be, let God makes us into these reflections. This is what it means to be created in God's image, isn't it?

"exact imprint of God's very being" - This makes fingerprints come to mind, or plaster casts of babies' feet.

The argument here seems to be: Jesus is better than angels. Was this a question in the early church? [Chris Haslam says it was \(sort of\), actually.](#)

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I *think* this passage from Hebrews may be the only non-gospel place that refers to Jesus' birth in the scriptures. But Hebrews' description sounds more like Revelation and less like Luke 2!

John 1:1-14:

This is John's take on a birth narrative. No shepherds, no angels, no Mary and Joseph, no manger. This is how John describes Jesus' coming into the world. The language is rich in metaphor, and though it lacks the characters of the traditional nativity, the point is still communicated without a doubt: 'And the word became flesh and lived among us'.

This is one of my favourite passages in the Greek New Testament, not only because of the easy, repetitive vocabulary :) but also because it is poetic and lyrical through the simple, repetitive structure. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Passages like this from John provide the strongest basest for our Trinitarian Christian Creeds. Jesus was "in the beginning with God."

I think we are all, like John the Baptist, meant to *testify*, or witness, to the light. How do you do it? Witnessing means telling what you know about something, like at a trial. What do you know about the light that is Christ?

By Beth Quick

LECTIONARY NOTES Set III

[Isaiah 52:7-10](#): A song in celebration of those who proclaim the good news of God's salvation and rulership, for God has redeemed God's people in the sight of all nations.

[Psalm 98](#): A call to praise God for God's salvation, faithfulness and love for God's people, in which musicians, vocalists and all creation are invited to join the song, because God has established justice in the world.

[Hebrews 1:1-4\(5-12\)](#): Although in the past God spoke through prophets, now God has spoken through God's Son, through whom all things were created. The Son is the light of God's glory, and sustains all things. He cleansed people from sin and sat at God's right hand. He is far greater than any of the angels – who worship him – and his throne is eternal.

[John 1:1-14](#): The Word who existed in eternity with God, and through whom all things were made, has become flesh, lived among us, and revealed God's glory to us. John came as a witness to this light, who was not welcomed by his own people, but who has enabled those who did receive him to become God's children.

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

At the heart of the Christmas readings is the proclamation of God's reign. Isaiah celebrates the Messenger who proclaims the good news of God's reign. Psalm 98 describes God, and all of creation, announcing God's victory and the coming of God's just judgement. In Hebrews, the desire of God to communicate God's love and grace is described – God spoke through prophets, but now speaks through God's Son. In the Gospel, God's Word is embodied, incarnated, bringing life and a relationship with God to all who receive Christ. When we place these readings alongside the particular focus of the year of Luke, we get a

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unique perspective on the way God's Reign is proclaimed (even though Luke's Gospel is not actually used on Christmas Day). Two ideas that stand out in the readings that resonate with Luke's perspective on the Reign of God are "justice" and "all nations". For Luke, the Reign of God has particular significance for the outsider – the poor, the powerless, the Gentile, women, and it these people, in particular, who need and long for God's justice to be revealed. So, the Christmas story is one of hope for those who long for justice, ensuring them that God's justice is indeed here. It is also one of challenge for those who oppose justice, assuring them that God's Reign will not be resisted, and ultimately justice will prevail. Finally, this justice is all-inclusive. It is not just for some people but for all people, and it includes all of creation. The Christ Child – the Light who has come into the world (in John's words) – is not a gentle, meek and mild baby, so much as a dangerous, subversive, revolutionary who, even in the manner of his incarnation, upsets the power, wealth and status systems of our world. May this be the message we proclaim this Christmas!

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: The challenging call of this year's Christmas message is to celebrate the incarnate One, while recognising that the life and light that Christ has brought into the world can only really be received and enjoyed when we live in solidarity with the weak, vulnerable, poor and powerless. We are to be those who listen and respond to God's word spoken in Christ through acts of mercy, kindness, justice and love. But, we are also to be those whose feet are lovely as we bring the Good News of God's justice to others. It is tragic, then, that Christians are often known more for fighting against the so-called "War on Christmas" (which is really just a refusal to bow to particular theological and cultural norms that certain Christians try to impose on everyone), than we are for our acts of justice and mercy, inclusion and service, at this time. We need to be reminded that within the "weakness" of this Child, amazing strength is manifest. Christ reveals God's refusal to buy into human political or economic systems or agendas (even Christian ones), revealing their darkness while not being overcome by them. The incarnation, then, must call us to reject "worldly" values of materialism, consumerism, separatism, and judgementalism, while welcoming all people into the just, peaceful, gracious and inclusive Reign of God. If there is anything to celebrate this Christmas, it is not the gifts we give, but the promise of a new reality in which we are called to participate.

LOCAL APPLICATION: The incarnation of Christ calls us to be participants in incarnation. In our communities and churches we can embody the just ways of Christ, opting out of the power struggles and "worldly" use of faith/religion for political or material gains. We can embrace the hidden, agenda-less, self-giving life of Christ. And if we will renew our commitment to incarnation, we will seek and find the places that most need us to serve, heal, and reconcile while also confronting abuses of power, wealth or faith. This is Christmas in the spirit of the Year of Luke, lived with a clear sense of God's Reign coming among us and within us again. This is truly Good News, which will be welcomed by those around us, who are served, protected, healed and uplifted by our presence and compassion. This is what demonstrates the reality of Christ's life and the "victory" of God which is celebrated in the Psalm and Isaiah. If we are willing to listen to the message of compassion, inclusivity and justice that God has spoken through Christ, and if we are willing to embody that message in our own lives, families and communities, we will know the true light of Christmas coming into the world, and we will know ourselves as those who have received Christ, who believe in his name, and who are rightly called children of God.

SERMON OUTLINE

Lk 2.8f There were shepherds living in the fields...

In every Nativity scenario whether in school play or church there are always the shepherds – traditionally wearing striped dressing gown & tea towel tied around the head – an easy option for any parent whose child is chosen for the part – no lines to learn – only to look fearful at the appropriate time....

1. Facing the night – after a long day looking after the sheep – on constant watch for wild animals – the long walk to find pasture & fresh water – no cosy chairs or home comforts – only bone hard ground.... So they settled down for the night – once the flocks settle....

2. Fearing the worst – It seemed just like any other night.... There had to be more to life than this constant round of shepherding & sleeping – it was so boring.....

Suddenly all that changed - *an angel of the Lord stood before them, & the glory of the Lord shone around them, & they were terrified. They received astounding news to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord - you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.*

3. Finding the baby - *16 they went with haste & found Mary and Joseph, & the child lying in the manger. What joy was theirs – picture them glorifying & praising God for all they had heard & seen, as it had been told them.*

What joys is ours as we celebrate the birth of Jesus!

Norman Porteous

SERMON

And the Word became flesh (Jn 1:14)

The language of God

A young man was intrigued by this question: what language does God speak? He asked people around, what is the language of God? And no one was able to offer him a satisfactory answer. So the young man undertook a journey going in search of the answer to his all important question. His first stop was a village. He asked the people there: what language does God speak? None of them could answer the question. “But,” they said, “there is a holy man who lives on the hill outside our village who perhaps has the answer to your question.” So the young man went to the holy man. Holy, for sure, he was. And the man said, “Look around you. See the beauty of creation: the green meadow, the flowing stream, the glistening sun, the romantic moon and the gentle breeze. Yes, this is the language of God.” So the young man stayed there enjoying the beauty of creation. God was there but the young man was not satisfied. Creatures, after all, are not perfect enough! So after a few days he said good-bye to the holy man and went on his way.

Along the way, the young man came across a group of men who looked very austere, serene and wise. He told them of his journey and his search. They said, “God speaks the language of your heart. Sit and meditate. You will hear Him.” That is what the young man did. He sat. He meditated. Day after day. He came to discover many truths about himself, God and about his relationships. This brought him much serenity, wisdom and meaning. Yet he was not convinced that his question had been answered. He had not experienced the voice of God tangibly. So he continued his journey.

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After some months of search, he reached a holy place – a temple of sorts. There he saw a bearded man seated by the window trying to read from a scroll in the faint light. The young man approached him with much reverence. As if not to disturb him the young man put his question in a feeble voice: “Sir, what language does God speak?” The holy man looked up and said, “This, this book, it is the word of God. Read this and you will hear God.” The young man began to read the holy book. He spent day and night reading, reflecting, and listening to the holy man explain the writings. It was really enlightening. There were days when the young man would just open a section of the scroll and read, and it was as if the message came from God himself. Slowly he began to discover that there were some errors in the writing; there were some particularities of that culture and language. So he felt his question was not answered yet.

He continued his pilgrimage. He reached a city. It was getting dark. The city was crowded with people. And people were still pouring in for something important. He went around looking for a place to spend the night. There was no place in the inn. So he was directed to a cave in the outskirts of the city. When he entered the cave, there he saw a young couple with a new-born babe. As the young man stood hesitantly at the entrance, the mother welcomed him in. She showed him the little babe and said, “This is the language of God.”

God has spoken

In the second reading of today we heard the opening lines of the letter to the Hebrews: “At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son...” (Heb 1:1). Similar sentiments are expressed in the First Letter of John: “Something which has existed since the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own hands, the Word of life — this is our theme. That life was made visible; we saw it and are giving our testimony, declaring to you the eternal life, which was present to the Father and has been revealed to us. We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you too may share our life. Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1Jn 1:1-3).

We have reasons to celebrate because God has spoken in a language beyond all spoken language. He is one of us. He has shared our human condition. This is the mystery that we celebrate today: “The word was made flesh, he lived among us” (Jn 1:14). Today, God is seen in the form of a little babe. Human babies generate a sense of awe in us. Babies create a sense of mystery. Babies attract us. Yes, God in Jesus, born today in the form of little babe attracts us. He invites us to see his glory. The little crib in our chapel with all those figurines simply tells us how concrete and tangible God has made himself to be.

That I may see, hear and touch

It is said that when St Francis of Assisi gave instructions to one John Velitta in the town of Greccio in Italy to prepare the first crib in 1293, with real animals and people, Francis seems to have said: “If you desire that we should celebrate this year’s Christmas together at Greccio, go quickly and prepare what I tell you; for I want to enact the memory of the Infant who was born at Bethlehem and how He was bedded in the manger on hay between a donkey and an ox. *I want to see all of this with my own eyes.*”

How marvellously true is the mystery that we celebrate today? God takes on a human form so that we might see Him with our own eyes. As the angels invited the shepherds on www.churchnewsireland.org

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the night of the first Christmas, "Today in the town of Davida saviour has been born to you", we are invited today to behold the God-made-flesh.

Let the celebration of Christmas, then, rekindle in us our own deep desire for God: to hear, see and touch Him.

"The Lord has made known his salvation.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God,

Shout to the Lord all the earth, ring out your joy." (Ps 97).

Merry Christmas!

CHRISTMAS ILLUSTRATIONS

Consider Again Christmas

When Pope Julius I authorized December 25 to be celebrated as the birthday of Jesus in A.D. 353, who would have ever thought that it would become what it is today.

When Professor Charles Follen lit candles on the first Christmas tree in America in 1832, who would have ever thought that the decorations would become as elaborate as they are today.

It is a long time since 1832, longer still from 353, longer still from that dark night brightened by a special star in which Jesus the king was born. Yet, as we approach December 25 again, it gives us yet another opportunity to pause, and in the midst of all the excitement and elaborate decorations and expensive commercialization which surround Christmas today, to consider again the event of Christmas and the person whose birth we celebrate.

Brian L. Harbour, James W. Cox, *The Minister's Manual*: 1994, San Fransico: Harper Collins, 1993, p. 254.

Taking Christmas to Heart

A popular play and movie this time of year, one I always enjoy watching is A Christmas Carol. There is one scene that has always fascinated me. The Ghost of Christmas Past has just paid a very discomfoting visit to Ebenezer Scrooge. Clearly the old miser is shaken by the entire ordeal. But when he awakens from his sleep does he take the message to heart. No, he simply dismisses it by saying: Bah, humbug, it wasn't real.

"Just a bit of last nights undigested beef," he says to himself, "There is more gravy about you than the grave." A vision to be taken to heart or simple indigestion. You tell me.

Staff Writers, Sermons.com.

What have you heard and Seen this Christmas?

Oh, you say, had I been there at Bethlehem that night I would have seen. I would have understood. I would have known it was the Christ child. Would you? There is one way of knowing:

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Ask yourself what you have seen and heard this Christmas Season.

When you watched the 6:00 news did you see chaos and strife, or did you see sheep without a shepherd. When you went out to do your shopping did you see only hordes of people in the stores, or did you notice the worried expressions on some of their faces-- worried because they are facing this Christmas without employment or enough money and they don't know how they are going to make ends meet.

What did you hear this Christmas?

Did you hear only the blast of music and carols, or did you hear the silent sighs of the lonely and the bereaved who may be dreading Christmas because it accentuates their loneliness. And in the midst of the sounds of honking horns and people arguing over parking places, did you hear faint sounds of laughter coming from Asbury Church missions projects because you furnished food and toys for families and children.

You see, so often what you see and what you hear is not dependent upon the event but upon you. If you did in fact hear the cry from the lonely, the laughter of poor children, if you saw the sheep without a shepherd, then, and only then, might you have noticed the events that took place in Bethlehem that night. If you lacked that spiritual seeing and hearing then you probably would have been with the 99% who were present but who saw or heard nothing out of the ordinary.

In the end perhaps one of our carols words it best: No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin. Where meek souls shall receive him still, the dear Christ enters in. Amen.

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

["Making Room,"](http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/12/09/christmas-eve-abc-2013/) the Rev. Canon Frank S. Logue, *Sermons that Work*, Episcopal Digital Network
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/12/09/christmas-eve-abc-2013/>

["Did You Find What You Were Looking For?"](http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/12/09/christmas-day-abc-2013/) the Rev Anjel Scarborough, *Sermons that Work*, Episcopal Digital Network
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/12/09/christmas-day-abc-2013/>

["Emmanuel - a Christmas article," "The Innkeeper,"](http://frederickbuechner.com/content/weekly-sermon-illustrations-emmanuel-christmas-article) Frederick Buechner.
<http://frederickbuechner.com/content/weekly-sermon-illustrations-emmanuel-christmas-article>

["Look to the Child,"](http://day1.org/3362-look_to_the_child) Rev. John Philip Newell, *Day 1*
http://day1.org/3362-look_to_the_child

["Luminarias,"](http://day1.org/1022-luminarias) the Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/1022-luminarias>

["Sermon for Christmas Day,"](http://day1.org/970-sermon_for_christmas_day) Bishop Steven Charleston, *Day 1*
President and dean of Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, MA, 1999-2008.
http://day1.org/970-sermon_for_christmas_day

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[Christmas Sermons](#), Pastor Edward F. Marquart, Grace Lutheran Church, Seattle, Washington.

Links to 10 Christmas sermons, and to 5 children's addresses, plus dram and other resources.

<http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/christmas.htm>

CHILDREN

On the chancel steps - scroll down for Christmas

<http://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/>

[Highlighting the Chrismon Tree](#) - Fran Woodruff, *On the Chancel Steps*.

<https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2014/11/16/advent2014/>

[Worshiping with Children](#), Christmas Eve/Day, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown,

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/year-christmas-eve-or-day-december-24.html>

[Why Children Need to Get To Church on Christmas Eve/Christmas Day](#).

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/why-children-need-to-get-to-church-on.html>

[Stories about Christmas Celebrations and Themes](#), Carolyn C. Brown, *Worshiping with Children*

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2010/12/christmas-stories-for-worship.html>

Sermons4kids

http://www.sermons4kids.com/yr_c.htm

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

[Come Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)

[Joy To The World](#)

[Good Christian Men Rejoice](#)

[It Came Upon The Midnight Clear](#)

[Christmas Angels Medley](#)

[Angels From The Realms Of Glory](#)

[Do You Hear What I Hear](#)

[What Kind Of Throne](#)

[You Bring Peace](#)

Please commend this resource to colleagues - they simply send an email to churchnewsireland@gmail.com with the message Passwords in the title