

LITURGY NOTES

Advent/Christmas 2021

In This Issue

In this second issue of *Liturgy Notes* we cover the readings and music suggestions for Advent and Christmas in Year C. We look at the meanings of the Advent and Christmas seasons, the multiple masses of Christmas, and the practices of rose vestments and the Advent wreath.

Celebrating the Coming of Christ

The Advent/Christmas cycle consists of two very distinct seasons; each has its own meaning and features that should be noted.

Advent celebrates waiting for the coming of Christ and the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, in past, present, and future. It begins with the waiting that defines the Christian life for us living today in the “already-but-not-yet” of the Kingdom: the confident hope that at the end of time, Christ will return, and all things will accord with the will of God in the fulfillment of that reign. Working backwards through time, it enters into the memory of others who, like us, have waited for the Messiah: the prophets who spoke of the coming “day of the Lord,” the preparation for Christ’s ministry and mission by his “forerunner” John the Baptist, and then, at the very end of the season, those who waited for his birth. This season of darkness and light, quiet hope and promises proclaimed, allows us to contemplate the many ways that waiting for God has always been at the heart of the experience of God’s people.

The Christmas season, of course, celebrates the coming of Christ in human history: not just the birth of a child, but the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah in humble circumstance, the incarnation of the Word-made-flesh, and, at Epiphany, the manifestation of God’s chosen one even to those nations who hadn’t been waiting for him. It is a time to rejoice in the surprising, unexpected ways God’s grace shows itself in our lives, the fact that—thankfully—God’s saving deeds exceed all of our plans and hopes.

Part of the challenge of celebrating Christmas well liturgically is to allow Advent to be Advent and Christmas to be Christmas: to avoid anticipating Christmas too soon, but also to keep celebrating Christmas all the way through to Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord. In our words, our singing, and our art & environment, Christmas should not arrive too early, but once it does, it should stay for a while!

The Year of Luke

The beginning of Advent marks the start of a new liturgical year, Year C. This year we will come to know Jesus through the Gospel of Luke. By tradition, Luke was the travelling companion of St. Paul, and he acknowledges that he assembled his Gospel from the testimony of others, striving to put everything into “an orderly account” (Luke 1:3). The Gospel of Luke is the longest of the four gospels, and together with the Acts of the Apostles (by the same writer), the Lukan material forms about 20% of the New Testament corpus. The evangelist not only narrates Jesus’ life and the emergence of the early church, he does so with artistic precision. The Gospel of Luke is written in a more sophisticated style of Greek than the other Gospels, and it contains some of the most beautiful and familiar passages of the New Testament. The *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55), the *Benedictus* (1:68–79), and the *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29–32) are all found in the infancy narratives for John the Baptist and Jesus. Luke is responsible for preserving the parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37), the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:25–32), the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). Finally, Luke’s portrait of Jesus highlights a message of salvation for all people, especially the poor and marginalized.

Helpful Resources

Gadenz, Pablo T. *The Gospel of Luke*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018.

Harrington, Wilfred J. *Reading Luke for the First Time*. New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2015.

November 28, 2021 1st Sunday of Advent, C Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14–16

The prophet Jeremiah lived and worked in Jerusalem from approximately 640 BC until ca. 587 BC. Jeremiah’s ministry coincided with the reign of King Josiah (622–609 BC), the tenuous leadership of Josiah’s sons, and finally the fall of Judah to the Babylonians in 597 BC and 587 BC. Jeremiah is well known for the suffering he endured for the sake of delivering God’s word (see chapters 16 and 20), and also for the frequently bleak nature of his oracles. Jeremiah’s message was essentially that Judean society had become so corrupt that the Babylonian conquest was not only inevitable but necessary to purify the people. As you might imagine, Jeremiah was not well-received by most Judeans. Nevertheless, Jeremiah did have moments of hope in which he relayed messages of reassurance and restoration. Today’s reading is one such passage, in which Jeremiah speaks of a

“righteous branch to spring up for David” (Jer 33:15). This is a messianic prophecy, anticipating the return of true leadership to Judah. In verse 16 it sounds like the city of Jerusalem itself is the leader, and this might reflect the oneness of the city of Jerusalem with the presence of the King. The name “The Lord is our righteousness” in Hebrew is *yhwh tzidqenu*, which could refer to the King Zedekiah who ruled briefly just before Babylonian Empire’s destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:18). In time, however, the name gained a deep messianic understanding as a reference to the hoped-for-one who would save the house of Israel from its suffering.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25

This is a psalm of praise and trust in God who gives his instruction (*Torah*) to enable believers to follow him well. Although we cannot see it in English translation, the Hebrew of this psalm is an alphabetic acrostic, a literary device used to express the totality of something. It is a way of praising God “from A to Z,” as it were.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2

Written in approximately 49 AD, 1 Thessalonians is considered to be Paul's earliest letter that has come down to us. According to Acts 17:1, Paul finds himself in Thessalonica after a difficult stay in Philippi, but to his delight, he receives a warm welcome from some Thessalonians who care for his bodily needs, and who are open to the message of the gospel. 1 Thessalonians is often described as a friendship letter because of its warm tone and genuine care for the community Paul founded and then had to leave as he continued his travels. Paul's "good news" was that Jesus had risen from the dead, thereby inaugurating a new creation, and we can see Paul the Theologian at work in today's passage. Paul exhorts the community to remain holy so "that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints [holy ones]" (1 Thess 3:13). It is important to remember that the gospels had not yet been written, and so Paul's assertion that Jesus would return (*parousia*) reflects emerging Christian tradition and points to Paul's own role as a privileged witness of God's revelation. Paul's message to the Thessalonians is one that has endured over the millennia: live lives of holiness in preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Gospel: Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

The gospel reading comes from near the end of Luke's gospel, just before Jesus celebrates his last supper with his disciples. In this scene, Jesus is near the Temple in Jerusalem, and the disciples comment on how beautiful the Temple is (Luke 21:5). In response, Jesus seems to predict the destruction of the Temple (21:6), and continues on to detail the numerous signs that will accompany the end times (*eschaton*). In the portion that we read today, Jesus outlines the cosmic portents that will signal the end of the present age, and he urges his listeners to "be alert at all times" (21:36) so that they are fully prepared when the end times come. This is a style of ancient literature known as the apocalyptic genre, which frequently envisions a cataclysmic final end to

the present age, yielding to a new era of divine dominion. The end time was thought to be ushered in by the arrival of the Messiah, who would assemble all nations for judgment before God. Thus, it was important to live lives of faithfulness, moderation, and preparedness, because one never knew when the end time would come.

Reflection

It might seem strange or even alarming to read this very ominous Gospel passage today on the first Sunday of Advent. However, it reminds us that, in addition to preparing us to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas, Advent is also a time of introspection and preparation for the return of Christ (the *Parousia*) at the end of the present age. Today's readings invite us to consider how we will spend our waiting so as to be ready "to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). In this way, Advent, like Lent, is a time to purify our hearts and intentions, to strengthen our habits of prayer, and to be attentive to the needs of others.

Reflecting the Word in Song

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| Advent Gathering (G. Daigle) | G 250 |
| Come, O Long Expected Jesus (STUTTGART) | CBW 306 |
| Come, O Lord (M. Balhoff et al) | GP 48 |
| Come, Promised One (J. Becker) | CIS 6.13 |
| Emmanuel (S. Angrisano) | SS 140 |
| Every Valley (B. Dufford) | CBW 308 / GP 67 |
| The King Shall Come (MORNING SONG) | CBW 318 / G 248 |
| The King Shall Come (T. Thomson) | SS 143 |
| O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (VENI EMMANUEL) | CBW 312 / SS 141 |
| On Jordan's Bank (WINCHESTER NEW) | CBW 351 |

Prepare the Way (J. Berthier) CBW 317
Ready the Way (C. Stephan) SS 142
Wait for the Lord (J. Berthier) CBW 319 / G 256

December 5, 2021 2nd Sunday of Advent, C Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Baruch 5:1–9

The Book of Baruch is attributed to Baruch, the son of Neriah, who was the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah (Bar 1:1). Although it is set during the onset of the Babylonian Exile (*ca.* 587 BC), scholars believe that the book was written closer to the time of Jesus, around 170–165 BC, during the period of Hellenistic (Greek) persecution and occupation in Israel. The cultural memory of the traumatic events of the Babylonian Exile, coupled with the belief that God had ultimately delivered the people, provided a powerful way for Jews in the Hellenistic period to cope with ongoing persecution. By setting this book in the past, the author is essentially saying, “Believe! Have hope! Our God will deliver us!”

The passage we hear today comes from the final chapter of the book and features the personified city of Jerusalem who is transformed through God’s salvation. Through evocative clothing imagery, the prophet describes Jerusalem like a royal figure who casts aside her garments of mourning in order to rejoin the living. Jerusalem will be clothed in a robe of “the righteousness that comes from God,” and crowned with “the glory of the Everlasting” (Bar 5:2). The city will be renamed from “city of peace” (i.e. Jerusalem) to “Righteous Peace, Godly Glory” — a more covenantally and theologically profound name. Furthermore, Jerusalem will be a destination for all of Israel, who will share in the splendence of the city by returning in royal procession rather than as captives. These nine

verses are infused with hope, faithfulness, and confidence in God.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 126

The responsorial psalm echoes the theme of the Babylonian Exile in the first reading. Psalm 126 is thought to be the restorative counterpart to Psalm 137 (“By the rivers of Babylon...”). In this psalm, the exile is at an end; the people who wept (Ps 137:1), now have mouths “filled with laughter” and “shouts of joy.” Musical settings of this psalm should aim to evoke the intense rejoicing it expresses.

Second Reading: Philippians 1:3–6, 8–11

The Letter to the Philippians is one of the most beloved of Paul’s letters in Christian tradition. Although it is difficult to date the letter, it is clear that Paul is writing from prison (Phil 1:7), and this makes his repeated exhortations to rejoice all the more powerful (e.g. Phil 4:4–7). Paul’s reason for writing to the community in Philippi is to urge them to set aside internal divisions and to be of the “same mind” as Christ (Phil 2:5).

The passage read today comes from the standard “thanksgiving” portion of the letter. Greco-Roman letters would typically have a thanksgiving section near the beginning, offering gratitude for blessings received in the life of the letter writer. Paul’s thanksgiving is for the community itself, for its faith and for its concern for him. He includes a prayer that their love will continue to “overflow,” an image that anticipates his description that Christ “emptied himself” (lit. “poured himself out”) (Phil 2:7) and Paul’s own self “poured out as a libation” (Phil 2:17). The message is clear: the community is called to a radical form of service to each other, rather than jostling for positions of authority in the community (Phil 2:14; 4:2–3).

Gospel: Luke 3:1–6

This striking passage locates the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist within the Roman Imperial regnal and political system of dating. The rhetorical effect is to signal to the reader and hearer that John the Baptist is no

ordinary preacher in the wilderness: he is the official “herald” of good tidings, announcing the arrival of the Lord. A quick comparison to the beginning of Mark’s gospel (Mark 1:1–4) reveals how Luke has strengthened the tradition of John the Baptist into a more robust, more dignified role. This would capture the attention of Luke’s audience, which was likely more urban and more Hellenized than Mark’s audience.

In addition to the Roman political leaders, John’s appearance is reckoned according to the high priestly leadership of Annas and Caiaphas. John himself is the son of the priest Zechariah, and he would normally be expected to follow in his father’s footsteps. His alternative ministry, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in the wilderness (and not at the Temple), coupled with the announcement from Isaiah that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God,” indicates that this new encounter with God is available to everyone.

Reflection

Today’s readings share the theme of transformation due to the inbreaking of God’s action in the world. The gospel reading insists that “the time is now!” and Paul’s words to the Philippians encourage us to prepare our hearts and minds “so that in the day of Christ you may be found pure and blameless.” As we go through this second week of Advent, how can we prepare ourselves in prayerful, active waiting for the transformation in Christ we anticipate?

Reflecting the Word in Song

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| Advent Gathering (G. Daigle) | G 250 |
| Come, O Lord (M. Balhoff et al) | GP 48 |
| Come to Us (G. Walton) | SS 144 |
| Creator of the Stars of Night (CONDITOR ALME SIDERUM) | CBW 307 |

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| Every Valley (B. Dufford) | CBW 308 / GP 67 |
| Find Us Ready (T. Booth) | SS 209 |
| God Has Chosen Me (B. Farrell) | G 488 |
| Listen, My People (P.-A. Durocher) | CBW 309 |
| O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (VENI EMMANUEL) | CBW 312 / SS 141 |
| On Jordan’s Bank (WINCHESTER NEW) | CBW 351 |
| Prepare the Way (J. Berthier) | CBW 317 |
| Return, Redeemer God (NUN DANKET) | CIS 6.14 |
| Wait for the Lord (J. Berthier) | CBW 319 / G 256 |

December 12, 2021 3rd Sunday in Advent, C

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14–18a

The Book of Zephaniah is one of the “Twelve Minor Prophets,” so-called because their works are shorter than the longer works of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The prophet Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah, and he lived and worked in Jerusalem ca. 610 BC, just before the Babylonian Exile. Zephaniah’s collected oracles number only three chapters, and the primary theme is of preparation for the Day of the Lord. The “Day of the Lord” was anticipated to be not just a single day in our manner of thinking, but rather the unfolding of an epoch when God would intervene in history, vanquishing Israel’s enemies and establishing Israel as the light to the nations in God’s reign over all of creation.

Today’s selection from Zephaniah comes from the very end of the book. It is an exuberant burst of praise and rejoicing because of God’s salvific presence in the midst of the people. Zion (the personified, poetic name for

Jerusalem) and God mutually rejoice in each other. The passage is filled with energy and joy.

Responsorial Canticle: Isaiah 12

Rather than a psalm, today's music comes from the prophet Isaiah. Like Zephaniah's oracle, this passage rejoices in God's nearness and benevolence. An important aspect of this canticle is the expression of trust in God. The singer's praise and exaltation in God is rooted in profound confidence in God's presence.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4–7

Paul's exhortation to rejoice comes at the end of his letter to the Philippians. When St. Jerome translated the New Testament from Greek into Latin (ca. 390 AD) he rendered the Greek word "*Chairete*" (rejoice) as "*Gaudete*," which in turn became the honorific for the third Sunday in Advent. In this short passage we receive a recipe for the Christian life: Rejoice in God always, be gentle to others, do not worry about anything, remember to pray in thanksgiving and in supplication. At the very centre of these instructions is the statement: The Lord is near (Phil 4:5). For the Philippian community, Paul's words would have been surprising: how could Paul instruct them in this way when he himself was in prison? How could he possibly rejoice? Paul's message to the Philippians is that there is never a bad time to praise God and be kind to one another, even when it feels difficult to do so. God's nearness ensures it is meaningful.

Gospel: Luke 3:10–18

John the Baptist finds himself surrounded by crowds who have come to be baptized by him (3:7). He admonishes them to ensure that their intentions for receiving baptism are pure (3:7–9), and in turn they ask him what they should do. Their questioning is not only to learn what the proper course of action is for themselves, it is also to determine whether or not John is authentic. John's answer surprises them. He tells them that, rather than storing up material goods, they should divest themselves of anything extra, giving their bounty to those in need. In the society of John's day, one's material wealth was a direct indicator of a

person's prestige in the community, and so it would be like saying to the president of a modern day company: "you must stop using your title and you must share in an equal salary between yourself and all your employees." Notably, John addresses his remarks to the tax collectors and Roman soldiers, neither of whom were known for their piety. The people recognize that this kind of radical social justice has the hallmarks of messianic expectations and they question "in their hearts" whether John might be the Messiah. John points away from himself to the coming of Jesus who will baptize with "the Holy Spirit and with fire." The images of winnowing and burning chaff are dramatic and even frightening, and are meant to infuse John's message for preparation with the utmost urgency.

Reflection

Curiously, while the first and second readings today discuss rejoicing, the gospel reading does not. Rather, the gospel focusses on a message of preparation through works of social justice. This invites us to consider what authentic rejoicing in the Lord really is. The implication drawn from all the readings is that sincere rejoicing in the Lord's nearness and salvation is coupled with care for our neighbour, especially for the poor. One cannot truly "rejoice in the Lord" unless one is also rejoicing in precisely those whom the Lord loves in a particular way. We can bring this message into action during our Advent preparations by extending our gift-giving and care to those in need.

Reflecting the Word in Song

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| Advent Gathering (G. Daigle) | G 250 |
| The Advent of Our God (ST. THOMAS) | CBW 315 |
| Anthem (T. Conry) | G 494 / GP 13 |
| Come and Set Us Free (T. Thomson) | SS 134 |
| Find Us Ready (T. Booth) | SS 209 |

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| God Has Chosen Me (B. Farrell) | G 488 |
| In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful (J. Berthier) | G 396 |
| LORD JESUS, WE MUST KNOW YOU (ST. THEODULPH) | CBW 517 |
| O Come, Divine Messiah (VENEZ DIVIN MESSIE) | CBW 310 |
| On Jordan's Bank (WINCHESTER NEW) | CBW 351 |
| Prepare the Way (J. Berthier) | CBW 317 |
| Ready the Way (C. Stephan) | SS 142 |
| There is a Longing (A. Quigley) | CIS 6.15 / SS 366 |

December 19, 2021 4th Sunday of Advent, C

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Micah 5:2–5a

The prophet Micah lived in Judah around the same time as the prophet Isaiah, possibly between 759–687 BC. But whereas Isaiah was a prophet within the royal household in Jerusalem, Micah was a more rural prophet, from a small town called Moresheth in the south west of Judah. In contrast to Isaiah, whose prophecies reflect his urban context, Micah's oracles articulate a deep concern for "the little guy," the everyday Judean who was subject to the results of decisions made by people in higher offices. Micah's collected oracles, though few in number, are a blistering critique against those who exploit the poor for their own gain, especially the urban elites in Jerusalem.

The oracle we hear today serves both as a reminder and as an expression of hope. In Micah's anticipation that the one "who is to rule in Israel" (5:2) shall come from Bethlehem, he reminds his hearers that the kingship descended from David has its roots in Bethlehem, rather than in the capital, Jerusalem (see 1 Samuel 16:1). Following the

fall of Judah in 586 BC and the subsequent, continuous foreign occupation of Judah, Micah's prophecy that the Davidic ruler (the Messiah) would come from Bethlehem became a message of hope for the people living in anticipation of the Kingdom of God. The two gospels that describe Jesus' infancy (Matthew and Luke) both express Jesus' connection with Bethlehem, which in turn helps readers and hearers of the gospels recognize Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80

Psalm 80 is a song of petition, asking God to have regard for Israel and to save the people. The frequent expression of God's "face" was a way for the psalmists to express God's presence and attentiveness to the people.

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5–10

This passage from Hebrews is a reflection on what constitutes authentic devotion. In various places in the Old Testament there is a tension regarding sacrifices: did God truly want animal and grain sacrifices? Might not these be empty of meaning if a person did not have a sincere disposition (see, for example, the prophet Amos). Hebrews describes how Jesus' commitment to completely align himself with the will of God serves as both the model for all believers and marks the end of the need for animal sacrifices and offerings. Jesus' total devotion and oneness with God meant that, even in the face of death, he would not concede that earthly powers were greater than God's. This meant that his own body became the ultimate once-for-all sacrifice. Believers who likewise align their will with God's and who trust in the efficacy of Jesus' self-offering share in the sanctification wrought by his death and resurrection.

Gospel: Luke 1:39–45

In this well-known passage Mary visits Elizabeth in the Judean hill country. We are acutely aware that, while the visit seems to be between the two women, the children that they carry—Jesus and John the Baptist—rejoice in one another's presence as well. Nevertheless, the focus of this scene is on the exchange

between the two women. We only hear Elizabeth's words in today's lection (verses 42–45), and the narrator tells us that Elizabeth utters these words after she "was filled with the Holy Spirit" (1:41). In Luke's gospel, as in the Old Testament, being filled with the Holy Spirit (or God's spirit in the OT) was a sign that the person's words and actions are through God's inspiration. Unlike her husband, Zechariah, who was struck mute, Elizabeth is gifted with the power of prophetic speech, and she uses it to convey to Mary how her unborn child "leaped for joy" at Mary's arrival. This image of a tiny, unborn baby, leaping for joy in Mary's and Jesus' presence points to John the Baptist's own role as a prophetic figure. In Isaiah 35 the prophet announces, "Here is your God!" (35:4) and declares "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy" (35:5–6). Mary's visit to Elizabeth is the occasion for prophetic words and actions to burst forth in the presence of God, incarnate as a tiny baby.

Reflection

The journey through Advent is nearly complete and the readings over the last four weeks have encouraged an active waiting that is characterized by introspection, deep listening, and openness to God's movements in our lives as we remember Jesus' birth and await his return in glory. We have frequently heard the word "joy" throughout these weeks, and it appears around us on Christmas cards and decorations. In these last days before Christmas, let us give some thought to the

things that make our own hearts "leap for joy." How are they rooted in the life of God? How can we share this joy with others?

Reflecting the Word in Song

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| Advent Gathering (G. Daigle) | G 250 |
| The Advent of Our God (ST. THOMAS) | CBW 315 |
| Ave Maria (D. Kantor) | G 565 |
| Come, Emmanuel (T. Thomson) | SS 137 |
| Hail, Holy Queen, Enthroned Above (SALVE REGINA COELITUM) | CBW 457 / SS 200 |
| Hail Mary: Gentle Woman (C. Landry) | G 564 / GP 80 / SS 305 |
| Immaculate Mary (LOURDES HYMN) | CBW 463A / SS 201 |
| Mary, Woman of the Promise (DRAKE'S BROUGHTON) | CBW 465 |
| My Soul in Stillness Waits (M. Haugen) | G 252 |
| My Soul Gives Glory to the Lord (M. Joncas) | CBW 678 / G 14 |
| O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (VENI EMMANUEL) | CBW 312 / SS 141 |
| O Come, Divine Messiah (VENEZ DIVIN MESSIE) | CBW 310 |
| Soon and Very Soon (A. Crouch) | G 555 |

A Note on the Three Masses of Christmas

In the Roman tradition, the solemnity of Christmas has not one but *three* distinct masses for Christmas, each with its own formulary of readings and prayers: Mass During the Night, Mass at Dawn, and Mass During the Day. These three are in addition to the distinct Vigil of Christmas. Several factors come into play for deciding which one to celebrate at any given time.

While we now have multiple masses on Christmas Eve, traditionally, there was no mass of Christmas before midnight. The Vigil of Christmas was (and still can be) celebrated on the afternoon of December 24th. However, it is very important to note that, looking at the texts of the Christmas Vigil, it is *not* yet the celebration of Christmas itself; all of the texts speak of the celebration of the birth of Christ in the future tense. Unlike the vigils of Easter or Pentecost, for example, the Christmas Vigil is *not* yet the celebration of the solemnity.

For this reason, while the rubrics in the United States are different, our lectionary specifies that the Vigil readings and prayers are *not* to be used for Christmas Eve. People are coming to Christmas Eve masses to celebrate the occasion of Christmas itself, and the Vigil does not actually do so.

For Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, any of the three formularies can be substituted and used at any liturgy. Still, the one that makes the most sense on Christmas Eve is the Mass “During the Night.” This is the traditional “Midnight Mass” formulary, but it’s not actually called “midnight,” and our masses on Christmas Eve are really simply an anticipation and multiplication of the traditional Midnight Mass.

Those same infancy narrative readings can be used on Christmas morning, but it is ideal to use the different formularies at different times. The reading of John’s prologue “during the day” is a wonderful, meaningful complement to the familiar images of the manger and the shepherds.

For more details, you can Google the article “Timing Midnight Mass” from the journal *Pastoral Liturgy*.

December 25, 2021 Christmas (During the Night), C Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 9:2–4, 6–7

In its historical context, Isaiah of Jerusalem likely spoke this oracle during a time of deep turmoil in the region. The oracle expresses joy at the birth of a Judean prince, likely Hezekiah, who would become king over Judah in 705 BCE. However, while Isaiah may have uttered this oracle with a specific historical context in mind, his oracles were preserved and circulated and eventually ancient interpreters began to realize that they held further, deeper meanings. Particularly during the Second Temple Period, when Judah was

controlled by foreign powers for the majority of the time, oracles such as this one in Isaiah began to be understood as anticipating the coming of a Messiah who would restore the kingdom and bring peace. The book of Isaiah was especially revered among the early Christians, and this passage, describing the birth of a son who would bring peace, would not only remind them of who Jesus was while he lived among them, it would also provide further insight into his identity. For example, they may have recognized “Prince of Peace” as commensurate with Jesus’ life, while the other epithets would have provided further insight into the fullness of his person in the triune life of God: “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6). The gradual nature of these insights helps us remember that we too are “people who walked in darkness [who] have seen a great light” (Isaiah

9:2), and that our relationship with Jesus can deepen through pondering of the Word of God.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 96

Psalm 96 is one of the Royal Psalms that celebrates God as King over all creation. In the portions of the psalm we sing this evening not only are people invited to “sing to the Lord a new song,” the heavens and earth, the sea and its contents and even the trees of the forest are invited to join in song. In other words, the psalmist exhorts the whole of creation to “rejoice before the Lord; for he is coming” (96:11, 13)

Second Reading: Titus 2:11–14

The Letter to Titus is addressed to one of Paul’s co-workers who is mentioned in Galatians and 2 Corinthians. This is one of the later letters associated with Paul, and we can see that the initial Pauline expectation of Jesus’ immanent return has given way to encouragement for how to live lives that are exemplary and prepared for Jesus’ return in glory. This short excerpt is replete with instructions to cultivate a purified moral life. First, any effort is done through God’s grace. Next, impiety and worldly passions should be left behind, to embrace lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly. This does not mean followers of Jesus couldn’t have any fun! What it does mean is that they should be “zealous for good deeds,” indicating that one’s belief in Jesus as the Messiah should be expressed, not in didactic pronouncements, but rather in works of kindness and compassion for others.

Gospel: Luke 2:1–16

Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth alternates between two extremes. On the one hand, Jesus’ birth is reckoned according to regnal, political and administrative people and events. The Angel of the Lord speaks to the shepherds in a style reminiscent of imperial announcements, using titles normally reserved for the Emperor (2:11), and “a multitude of the heavenly host” (literally, armies) joins the Angel of the Lord to triumphantly glorify God. On the other hand, and at the centre of it all, Jesus’ birth is narrated incredibly simply, “the time came for

her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7–8). The juxtaposition between the grandeur of the announcements and the simplicity of Jesus’ birth is the evangelist’s way of signalling the world-changing importance of Jesus while remaining true to how, in his ministry, Jesus will resist all worldly methods of conveying prestige and honour. Perhaps the unsung heroes of this passage are the shepherds: despite their fear and the oddness of the message (why would the saviour of the world be lying in a manger after all!), they recognize that they have been the recipients of divine revelation. Notably it is after the Angels have returned to heaven and they are once more in the darkness of the night. And yet they say, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:15). The shepherds witness to the importance of listening and discerning God’s actions in our lives.

Reflection

This is an exciting evening! Families are gathering, children are excited, and the atmosphere is festive and full. Tonight’s readings span the worlds of royal courts to shepherds’ fields to the interior lives of believers. Luke places Jesus’ birth at the literal centre of the gospel passage just heard, and we too are invited to imitate Luke’s approach. At the centre of all our festivities, let us remember Jesus as the tiny, vulnerable, poor little baby, and honour him by serving the tiny, vulnerable, and poor in our midst.

Reflecting the Word in Song

Angels We Have Heard on High (French traditional)

CBW 320 / SS 145

Awake, Awake and Greet the New Morn (M. Haugen)

CBW 303 / G 265

Born This Day (K. Canedo)

SS 146

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Carol at the Manger (M. Haugen) | G 275 |
| Emmanuel (T. Manion) | GP 65 |
| Good Christian Friends, Rejoice (IN DULCI JUBILO) | CBW 322 |
| Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (F. Mendelssohn) | CBW 323 |
| In Deepest Night (RENDEZ A DIEU) | CBW 324 |
| Joy to the World (G.F. Handel) | CBW 328 / SS 147 |
| Nativity Carol (F.P. O'Brien) | G 274 |
| O Come All Ye Faithful (J. Wade) | CBW 329A / SS 150 |
| Of the Father's Love Begotten (DIVINUM MYSTERIUM) | CBW 330 / SS 149 |
| Silent Night (F. Gruber) | CBW 332 / G 262 / SS 154 |

December 25, 2021 Christmas (At Dawn), C

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 62:11–12

This passage, taken from the end of the Book of Isaiah, stems from the post-exilic period in Judah. It was a time of great uncertainty, but also of deep hope, that a descendant of David would soon regain the Judean throne. However, Persian rule soon gave way to Hellenistic domination, and, despite a brief period of relative independence from 164 to 63 BC, the Roman occupation of the Ancient Near East seemingly disregarded Isaiah's prophecy of restoration. Nevertheless, Isaiah's words remained a source of hope and anticipation, that the Messiah would come and the whole earth would receive the news. Notice the transformation of the people as a result: "They shall be called 'The Holy People,' 'The Redeemed of the Lord'." The people of the Messiah find their entire identity consecrated through him.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 97

This morning's psalm is from a collection of psalms that celebrate God as King over the universe. The psalm describes how even nature itself proclaims the majesty of the Lord. The appropriate response of God's people is to "rejoice" and "give thanks."

Second Reading: Titus 3:4–7

The reading from Titus is a brief reflection on the astounding mercy and graciousness of God. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *hesed* tries to capture this characteristic of God; it means loyalty, devotion, steadfast love, mercy, compassion, and grace, all rolled into one term. In the letter to Titus we can see an echo of this concept when Paul says "the goodness and loving kindness of God" and "his mercy." Paul understands Jesus Christ as the fullest expression of God's mercy and grace towards all people. He notes that God's gift of his Son was "not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy..." In this way Paul reminds his readers that the presence of God-among-us is not transactional, but pure gift.

Gospel: Luke 2:15–20

We resume Luke's narrative where it left off last evening and join the shepherds as they go to Bethlehem to see "this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." The shepherds travel "with haste," just as Mary had done when she went to see Elizabeth, and they meet Mary and Joseph and "the child lying in the manger" (Luke 2:16). The shepherds then become like the angels! Just as the angels had "made known" this "good news of great joy" to the shepherds (2:10, 15), so too the shepherds make known "what had been told to them about this child" (2:17). Although we do not hear the shepherds' words directly, we are told that Mary "treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (2:19). Mary, the first person to know Jesus the most intimately, receives the shepherds' testimony and, in her wisdom, carries their words in the depths of her being.

Reflection

There is something very beautiful about waking early on Christmas morning, before the flurry of the day begins. These quiet moments are an invitation to sit with the gospel reading and to perhaps imagine ourselves as one of the shepherds who enter a familiar environment—a manger scene—to encounter the extraordinary. What of the shepherd's experience can we ponder in our hearts?

Reflecting the Word in Song

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Angels We Have Heard on High (French traditional) | CBW 320 / SS 145 |
| Awake, Awake and Greet the New Morn (M. Haugen) | CBW 303 / G 265 |
| Born This Day (K. Canedo) | SS 146 |
| Carol at the Manger (M. Haugen) | G 275 |
| Emmanuel (T. Manion) | GP 65 |
| Good Christian Friends, Rejoice (IN DULCI JUBILO) | CBW 322 |
| Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (F. Mendelssohn) | CBW 323 |
| In Deepest Night (RENDEZ A DIEU) | CBW 324 |
| Joy to the World (G.F. Handel) | CBW 328 / SS 147 |
| Nativity Carol (F.P. O'Brien) | G 274 |
| O Come All Ye Faithful (J. Wade) | CBW 329A / SS 150 |
| Of the Father's Love Begotten (DIVINUM MYSTERIUM) | CBW 330 / SS 149 |
| Silent Night (F. Gruber) | CBW 332 / G 262 / SS 154 |

December 25, 2021 Christmas (During the Day), C Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 52:7–10

This passage in Isaiah comes from a portion of the book that is usually dated to the end of the Babylonian exile. The prophet describes a messenger who ascends a mountain in order to announce “good news” (or gospel!). The good news the messenger brings are words of peace and salvation. The images presented in this passage are of a fortress staffed with watchmen who, rather than preparing for an attack, break into singing because “they see the return of the Lord to Zion.” In its historical context, this oracle would have expressed the joy of the return to and rebuilding of Jerusalem. Eventually, however, it came to be understood as a prophecy that would find fuller fulfillment (a *sensus plenior*) with the coming of the Messiah, and the early Christians soon connected this passage with Jesus. When the gospel of Mark begins, it echoes the language of Isaiah, saying “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

A repeated idea in this passage is that God's presence is fully manifest to all people and nothing is hidden. A messenger announces from a mountain, the watchmen lift up their voices and sing, in “plain sight” the Lord returns to Zion, the Lord “has bared his arm before the eyes of all the nations,” and “all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” The prophet proclaims God's works boldly and without fear.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 98

The psalm continues the theme of the first reading, proclaiming that “all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.” The idea of “all the ends of the earth” is a way of expressing “the whole created order.” At the centre of God's actions are God's “steadfast love” and “faithfulness” for Israel.

Second Reading: Hebrews 1:1–6

The second reading is more contemplative than the first reading and responsorial psalm. The author recognizes that Jesus is God's revelation. Just as God spoke through the prophets, so too the Son is God's communication to us. However, the Son shares a oneness with God that even the prophets did not share. Hebrews says "he is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Heb 1:3). At the time that the author of Hebrews was writing, angels had become a vibrant part of Jewish concepts of heaven and the reign of God. Among the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, angels play a dynamic role in doing God's work on earth. In light of these ideas, the author of Hebrews clarifies that Jesus was not in a category akin to the angels, but rather, is far superior to the angels. The author supports this by saying "for to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'?" Here the author quotes from Psalm 2:7 and alludes to the words spoken at Jesus' baptism (see Mark 1:11). Hebrews is replete with references and allusions to other parts of scripture. It is a way for the author to demonstrate that Jesus is not just a prophet, nor like the angels, but in a unique, revelatory relationship with God the Father.

Gospel: John 1:1–18

While the earlier masses for Christmas drew from Luke's gospel for Year C, Mass During the Day always has John's Prologue as the gospel reading on Christmas Day. These verses express three important facets of Jesus' identity and mission. First, it witnesses to the existence of the Word, eternally, with God. Next, it expresses the reality of the Incarnation. Third, it emphasizes that the God's revelation through Jesus must be received by believers who are then called to witness to their experience. As anyone who has studied the Gospel of John knows, the Prologue has depths of meaning, structural considerations, and important terminology that can fill libraries—this is too much for Christmas Day! Rather, consider the hymn-like

quality of these verses. Notice how something is said about God (Father and Son), and then something is said about witnessing or testifying or believing. This movement between God and witnessing believers goes to the very heart of Christmas: God has become one of us. God is in relationship with us, and God is very near! We who "have seen his glory" are called to share this good news.

Reflection

The readings this morning alternate between triumphant proclamation and the solemn pondering of the reality of the Incarnation. It is a lot to ingest, especially on a busy day for many people. One consideration is to make space within the liturgy itself for quiet contemplation of God's wondrous mercy and Jesus' fullness. Perhaps at the end of the homily the homilist could read the gospel again, very slowly, inviting people to close their eyes and breathe, allowing their whole beings to participate in these mysteries.

Reflecting the Word in Song

Angels We Have Heard on High (French traditional)

CBW 320 / SS 145

Awake, Awake and Greet the New Morn (M. Haugen)

CBW 303 / G 265

Born This Day (K. Canedo)

SS 146

Carol at the Manger (M. Haugen)

G 275

Emmanuel (T. Manion)

GP 65

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice (IN DULCI JUBILO)
CBW 322

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (F. Mendelssohn)
CBW 323

In Deepest Night (RENDEZ A DIEU)

CBW 324

Joy to the World (G.F. Handel)

CBW 328 / SS 147

Nativity Carol (F.P. O'Brien)

G 274

O Come All Ye Faithful (J. Wade)
CBW 329A / SS 150

Of the Father's Love Begotten (DIVINUM
MYSTERIUM)
CBW 330 / SS 149

Silent Night (F. Gruber)
CBW 332 / G 262 / SS 154

December 26, 2021 Holy Family, C

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: 1 Samuel 1:20–22, 24–28

In the Old Testament, Samuel was an important figure who is portrayed as transitioning Israel from the period of Judges to the period of the monarchy. Samuel embodies the prophetic and judge-like leadership qualities of the figures who have preceded him (e.g. Moses, Joshua, Gideon), while anticipating the king-like qualities of those who will follow after him (David and Solomon especially). His birth narrative, which we hear part of today, emphasizes Samuel's abiding and deeply personal relationship with God, along with his wisdom.

Samuel's confidence in the Lord comes from his mother, Hannah. Prior to Samuel's birth, Hannah was barren, and she takes it upon herself to petition God for a child. In the Old Testament it is unusual for a woman to make and offering and to pray to God directly, yet Hannah goes to the shrine at Shiloh and "presented herself before the Lord" (1 Sam 1:9). She prays so deeply and fervently that the priest Eli thinks she is drunk! (1 Sam 1:12). Part of her vow is that, if the Lord should grant her a child, she will in turn gift the child into God's service for his whole life. The Lord hears Hannah's prayers and "remembered her" and she conceives and bears Samuel who will likewise have the ear of the Lord (see 1 Sam 3:19). Hannah waits until Samuel is weaned—likely around age 3 or 4—and then brings him to Shiloh in fulfillment of her vow. Hannah's love for Samuel is profound and deep, as we can see in 1 Sam 2:19, describing how she

makes a little linen robe and brings it to him each year. While it is difficult for us to imagine leaving such a small child, this was a way of offering to God the most one could offer in the ancient world. Hannah's prayer of praise (1 Sam 2:1–10) forms the inspiration for Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), and Luke's depiction of Jesus' childhood contains echoes of Samuel and his wisdom (1 Sam 3:19–21 and Luke 2:52).

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 84

In Psalm 84 the psalmist reflects on the joy of being in the "house of the Lord." In its historical context, this referred to the Temple in Jerusalem where the ark of the covenant was housed, and where God's presence was believed to dwell. The psalmist sings of how even being the doorkeeper of the house of the Lord—and therefore in the most liminal position—would be better than having to live in "tents of wickedness." Today we can hear this psalm as a prayer expressing the joy of dwelling in God's "house" through our belief in Jesus Christ (see John 14:2).

Second Reading: 1 John 3:1–2, 21–24

The Letters of John were written near the end of the first century AD and are connected thematically and conceptually with the Gospel of John. The First Letter of John is addressed to the community "behind" the gospel, and it functions as an exhortation to bolster their spirits in the face of opposition. In the passage for today the author reminds the community of Jesus' commandment to love one another (see John 13:34). Following this commandment will not only strengthen the community, but will also bring each person closer to Christ. The author also expresses the notion of adoptive kinship: since they are believers in Jesus Christ, they too have become children of God. This is a profound theological statement because it widens the notion of "family" beyond biological families to encompass all believers.

Gospel: Luke 2:41–52

This passage is the only Gospel account that tells us something about Jesus' youth. On the surface it might seem like a story about a

young man chafing at the last vestiges of childhood, but in fact it is a careful story that has theological and symbolic relevance for the rest of the gospel. We learn that Jesus' family is attentive to requirements of the *Torah*, and they journey to Jerusalem from Nazareth in order to attend the Passover festivities. Jerusalem and the Temple are central to the Gospel of Luke—the gospel begins and ends there, and when Jesus' Galilean ministry ends, his whole being is oriented to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51).

Apart from the note that “the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it” (Luke 2:43), the narrative is related from the perspective of Jesus' parents, which means that like Mary and Joseph, the readers and hearers are also searching for Jesus. We learn that Jesus has spent his days in the “House of the Lord” where the presence of God was believed to dwell. Filled with wisdom, he sits with the teachers “listening to them and asking them questions” (Luke 1:47). The teachers are amazed at his answers, and his parents are astonished that he is there! Mary's words convey the fear and worry they had for his sake—a justifiable anxiety. However, Jesus' response contrasts his own understanding (1:47) with his parents' lack of it (1:50). This is not to suggest that they are ignorant, but rather it establishes that even at the age of twelve, Jesus perceived a oneness with God the Father that he lived with his whole being. The number of days is curious; if Mary and Joseph had gone a day's journey before doubling back, there are two days gone already. Another three days are spent in Jerusalem. The five days in total perhaps has resonance with the Five Books of Moses (the Pentateuch), and the three days certainly anticipates the three days of Jesus' absence following his death on the cross. Jesus explains that he has been “in my Father's House” (1:49), which establishes a contrast with the three days in the tomb and at the same time alerts us that Jesus' absence on Holy Saturday is a part of his divine work. The phrase, “His mother treasured these things in her heart,” connects with her similar response after the shepherds visit, relating what the

Angel of the Lord told them following Jesus' birth (2:19). This helps us connect Jesus' action in the temple to his Messianic identity (2:11).

Reflection

Our modern society frequently has much more individualistic notions of identity and autonomy. These readings are a powerful reminder that our family networks, whether biological or through shared faith and community (as in the second reading) are part of who we are as individuals. Samuel will learn how to pray just like his mother did. Jesus must learn that his deep connection with God the Father must be brought into union with his nuclear relationships. And the community in the Letter of John must remember that together they form the children of God in love, not as independent units who happen to believe the same thing. On this feast day, let us remember all the many connections that shape us into the people we are.

Reflecting the Word in Song

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| The Aye Carol (J. Bell) | G 277 |
| Blest Are Those Who Love You (M. Haugen) | CBW 628 / G 111 |
| The First Nowell (THE FIRST NOWELL) | CBW 344 |
| For the Beauty of the Earth (DIX) | CBW 531 |
| God is Love! The Heavens are Telling (ABBOT'S LEIGH) | CBW 560 |
| Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (F. Mendelssohn) | CBW 323 |
| I Sing a Maid (M. Joncas) | CBW 462 / G 563 |
| Lord God, You Now Have Set Your Servant Free (SONG I) | CBW 680 |
| Lord of All Hopefulness (SLANE) | CBW 497 |
| Now Let Your Servant Go (CONDITOR ALME SIDERUM) | G 562 |

O Come All Ye Faithful (J. Wade)
CBW 329A / SS 150

Silent Night (F. Gruber)
CBW 332 / G 262 / SS 154

We Adore (S. Hart, S. Krippayne)
SS 152

What Child is This (GREENSLEEVES)
CBW 338 / SS 153

January 1, 2021 Mary, Mother of God, C Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Numbers 6:22–27

This beautiful passage is known as the “Priestly Blessing.” Moses instructs his brother, Aaron, the priest, to speak this blessing over all the people. At this point in the narrative of the Pentateuch, the people have received the *Torah* at Sinai and are preparing to continue their journey. This blessing is meant to protect the people and the purity of their camp by invoking God’s blessing. The phrases “make his face shine upon you” and “lift up his countenance upon you,” are biblical expressions to convey the hope that God will be present to the Israelites and show them his regard. The petition for peace (*shalom*) is a hope for well-being, safety, and God’s merciful protection for the people.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 67

This is a communal petition that beseeches God’s blessing and continued regard. The psalmist invites all nations to join in praising God who has blessed Israel so abundantly.

Second Reading: Galatians 4:4–7

Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians in the mid-50s AD. Although Paul had founded the community of believers there, other followers of Jesus had come after him and had convinced some of the Galatians that they first needed to become Jewish (including circumcision for males) and to follow the *mitzvot* (commandments) of the *Torah*. In many ways this could have seemed like a reasonable requirement—after all, Jesus was Jewish!

However, Paul is convinced them that Gentile followers of Jesus do not need to adhere to the whole *Torah*—why? While the tone of Paul’s letter is quite frustrated about these developments, this passage is a moment of theological clarity for Paul, concerning Jesus’ identity. Paul acknowledges that Jesus was “born of a woman, born under the law,” but he insists that those who believe in Jesus and who are baptized “receive adoptive sonship.” That is, Paul’s understanding is that Jesus, both truly human (born of a woman) and God’s son, has made it possible for Gentiles to share in the richness of the covenantal promises of salvation, simply through belief in Jesus. We read this passage today in celebration of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, because of her important role in bearing the fully human, fully divine Son of God.

Gospel: Luke 2:16–21

On this feast day we return to the manger scene and once more contemplate the shepherds’ visit to Mary and Joseph. In the next scene, Mary and Joseph bring their baby to be circumcised according to the law, which emphasizes Mary and Joseph’s devotion and observance of the *Torah*. The eighth day after birth is mandated as the day for circumcision in Lev 12:3. If we consider the seven-day scheme of creation, circumcision therefore takes place on the “new” first day, and so the circumcision ceremonially makes the baby “re-created” into the covenant. In Luke’s gospel, Jesus will be transfigured on the eighth day (Luke 9:28), and of course the resurrection takes place on the eighth day (Luke 24:1). By tradition, male babies would be called by their name for the first time on their circumcision day, and so we learn that “the child” “was called Jesus, the name given by the Angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Luke 2:21). Although she does not speak in this passage, Mary was the one to receive the name “Jesus” from the Angel (Luke 1:31). Thus she, like Elizabeth who names John (Luke 1:60), must have given Jesus his name.

Reflection

Today's readings invite us to consider the powerful role of Mary in Jesus' life. As the recipient of God's blessing and favour, Mary freely aligns her will with God's, accepting the blessing and (at times) perplexity that will come with mothering Jesus. Her faithful living out of the will of God is one she models for her son who will devote his whole life to doing the same. Mary, as the one to first share Jesus' name (that is above every other name (Phil 2:9)), furnishes him with his mission. "Jesus" is the Greek form of "Joshua," which means "Yahweh saves." Jesus lives his name. Finally, Paul teaches us that we can share in Jesus' sonship through our belief in his salvific work. Today we are invited to ponder how we are adoptive sons and daughters of the God the Father and of Mary: Mother of Wisdom, Mother of our Lord.

Reflecting the Word in Song

- Angels We Have Heard on High (French traditional)
CBW 320 / SS 145
- Ave Maria (D. Kantor)
G 565
- Hail Mary: Gentle Woman (C. Landry)
G 564 / GP 80 / SS 305
- Highly Favoured One (P. Coates, T. Crowley)
CBW 459
- I Sing a Maid (M. Joncas)
CBW 462 / G 563
- Holy Mary, Full of Grace (P. Decha)
CBW 461
- Immaculate Mary (LOURDES HYMN)
CBW 463A / SS 201
- Let It Be Done (C. Muglia)
SS 323
- Mary, Woman of the Promise (DRAKE'S BROUGHTON)
CBW 465
- Of the Father's Love Begotten (DIVINUM MYSTERIUM)
CBW 330 / SS 149

- Servant of the Word (O DU FROHLICHE)
CBW 467
- Silent Night (F. Gruber)
CBW 332 / G 262 / SS 154
- Song of Mary (D. Schutte)
CIS 6.24

January 2, 2021 Epiphany, C

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 60:1–6

In the Old Testament, the "glory of the Lord" was understood to dwell in the Temple in Jerusalem, where it resided over the Ark of the Covenant in the innermost sanctum—the Holy of Holies. The glory of the Lord is described as a luminous, cloud-like presence that overwhelms the beholder (1 Kings 8:10 and Ezekiel 10:4). When Moses descends Mt. Sinai, the brightness of God's presence is so intense that Moses' own face is shining! (Exod 34:29–30). In this passage from Isaiah, the prophet proclaims that the "glory of the Lord has risen upon you" and that in turn Israel will be reflect God's glory to all other peoples and nations. Israel will be a beacon of light in the darkness, that will draw all nations into the presence of God. This is a universal vision of salvation in which Israel's role is to radiate God's goodness and nearness to all.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 72

This is one of the royal psalms that celebrated the king of Israel. Some scholars suggest it was performed at a yearly ritual to celebrate the anniversary of the king's coronation. We can see in the psalm that the role of the king is not only to rule his own nation, but also to welcome the admiration and tribute of other nations. The king has a close relationship with God and he relies on God to guide him in governing.

Second Reading: Ephesians 3:2–3a, 5–6

Ephesus was a large, mostly Gentile, city in Paul's day. From Paul's words in this passage we get the sense that some of the Gentile

believers in Jesus may have had questions regarding whether or not they needed to adhere the Jewish *Torah* in order to be fully authentic followers of Jesus. Paul reassures them that through their belief in Jesus Christ, they too are “sharers in the promise” (Eph 3:6). What is “the promise”? In the ancient world, a person would strive to be in right standing with the divine realm. Often this would take the form of making animal sacrifices and grain and drink offerings. Both Jews and Gentiles practiced sacrifices and offerings and the hope was that these tributes would be pleasing to the divine realm and demonstrate their devotion. In turn, worshipers would hope for assistance and salvation from the divine beings. Paul’s message would have sounded completely radical, for it is like he is saying, “your salvation is guaranteed, you just have to believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and has gone before us to be with God the Father. No sacrifices are necessary, just believe!” It was probably difficult for the early followers of Jesus to cease the habits of sacrifices, but this is precisely what Paul is teaching. He urges people to trust in God’s grace and their belief as sufficient.

Gospel: Matthew 2:1–12

The gospel reading reflects the images presented in the first reading, psalm and second reading. Jesus’ birth has coincided with a celestial phenomenon and the brightness of the star has attracted the attention of foreign magi (or sages). By tradition there are three men from the East, though this only reflects the number of gifts that are given. We should understand the “wise men from the East” as representative of the whole of the known world at the time. In particular, the eastern world of the Babylonian Empire was known for its sophisticated astrology; thus the arrival of men from the East who come in response to a bright star indicates that they are educated regarding signs and portents. Sometimes these sages are themselves called “kings,” but in fact the only kings mentioned in this passage are King Herod and “the child who has been born king of the Jews,” establishing a contrast between

Herod’s corrupt reign and Jesus’ divine sovereignty. The three men give gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold is associated with royal wealth; frankincense is an expensive, perfumed plant-oil that may have been used in anointing ceremonies; and myrrh is also a fragrant oil that was used for burial. Thus, these gifts evoke Jesus’ divine kingship while also anticipating his death. The magi’s visit and gifts have a prophetic quality to them, in that they witness to God’s revelation. Indeed, as recipients of a dream from God not to return to Herod, they clearly are able to receive and act upon God’s communication.

Reflection

Epiphany, which means “manifestation,” is when the Church celebrates God’s self-revelation in the person of Jesus. Today’s readings encompass the sweep of everything from international politics to the simplicity of a newborn baby with his mother, and how this tiny, fragile creature prompts visiting diplomats to “pay homage” (Matt 2:11). As we near the end of Christmas season, the feast of the Epiphany encourages us to reflect on how we can prolong the brightness and love so manifest at Christmas into the days of Ordinary Time.

Reflecting the Word in Song

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Arise, Your Light is Come (FESTAL SONG) | CBW 302 |
| As With Gladness Men of Old (DIX) | CBW 343 |
| Born This Day (K. Canedo) | SS 146 |
| Brightest and Best (STAR IN THE EAST) | G 278 |
| City of God (D. Schutte) | CBW 345 / G 485 / GP 43 |
| The First Nowell (THE FIRST NOWELL) | CBW 344 |
| In the Darkness Shines the Splendour (IRBY) | CBW 346 |
| Joy to the World (G.F. Handel) | CBW 328 / SS 147 |

Lord, Today (D. Ducotte, G. Daigle)
G 279 / GP 136

O Star of Christ's Appearing (WIE LIEBLICH IST
DER MAIEN)
CBW 347

Songs of Thankfulness and Praise (SALZBURG)
CBW 348

We Adore (S. Hart, S. Krippayne)
SS 152

We Three Kings (KINGS OF ORIENT)
SS 151

What Child is This (GREENSLEEVES)
CBW 338 / SS 153

January 9, 2021 Baptism of the Lord, C Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11

Scholars recognize this passage as the start of the chapters ascribed to Deutero-Isaiah (or Second Isaiah). This portion of the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55) is thought to stem from near the end of the Babylonian Exile, when Cyrus of Persia had claimed the Babylonian throne and decreed that all the captive peoples should return to their homelands and rebuild. The exiled Judeans understood this turn of events to be the work of God through Cyrus, not Cyrus himself. Thus, the tone of these passages is exuberant and triumphant, rejoicing in the greatness of God who is Lord over all nations.

The passage we read today is filled with images from the Exodus, with God guiding his people through a desert to safety. This helps us to understand that the exiled Judeans interpreted their return to Judah and Jerusalem as being like a new Exodus moment. Just as God once led the people out of slavery in Egypt, so too now he leads them out of captivity in Babylon. The desert is no longer an obstacle; it becomes a highway. Mountains are smoothed, valleys are filled in, and the Lord guides his people home like a shepherd gathers his flocks. Through the metaphor of the shepherd, early

Christians understood this manifestation of God to refer to Jesus who described himself as a shepherd (see John 10:11), and all four gospels quote from Isaiah 40 in connection with John the Baptist as the voice of one crying out “in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord” (Isaiah 40:3, 9; see also Matt 3:1–3; Mark 1:1–4; Luke 3:1–6; John 1:19–23).

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 104

Psalm 104 is a lengthy psalm praising God for the beauty of creation. The Psalmist describes God as a master worker who rejoices in and sustains his creation.

Second Reading: Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7

The selections from the Letter to Titus reflect on the radical nature of God's gift of grace, the obligation to live moral lives in light of it, and the rebirth into new life that baptism entails. Paul speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit that is “poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:6–7). In the Old Testament, having God's spirit “come upon” a person meant that that person was in a special, covenantal standing with God and was imbued with God's favour. Paul explains that through baptism, each person receives this spirit, marking a moment of “rebirth and renewal” (Titus 3:5). Baptism is, therefore, a moment of new creation, when a person dies to sin and rises to new life in Jesus (Romans 6) and is called to live a life that is “self-controlled, upright, and godly” (Titus 2:11)

Gospel: Luke 3:15–16, 21–22

John the Baptist was such a powerful speaker and the transformative effect of his baptisms was so remarkable that people thought that he himself was the Messiah. Luke recounts how John corrects the people, pointing away from himself and to Jesus, the one who “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). This anticipates the gift of the spirit at Pentecost, and whereas John's baptism could be repeated each time a person was in need of forgiveness (much like sacrifices at the Temple), John teaches the crowd that Jesus'

baptism is a single event in a person's life. One a person has had the Spirit poured out into their heart in baptism, repetitions are no longer necessary! The synoptic gospels all describe the Spirit of God coming upon Jesus at his baptism by John. This is the Spirit that Jesus then shares with all believers.

Reflection

Many of us were baptized as infants or young children and have no memory of this momentous moment in our lives. Others of us were baptized as adults and it was likely such a thrilling and joyful moment that it would be wonderful to repeat it, wouldn't it? Baptism, however, is one of the Rites of Initiation in the Church, and so is not repeated. There is a profoundly beautiful aspect to this, because it encourages us to grow in our faith such that each day as a Christian feels like our baptism day. How are we renewed in Christ? How can we live in the Spirit as new creations each day?

Reflecting the Word in Song

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|---|------------------------|
| Baptized in Water (SCHONSTER HERR JESU OR BUNESSAN) | CBW 614 / G 572 |
| Come to the River (B. Hurd) | SS 51 |
| Come to the Water (J. Foley) | G 349 / GP 52 / SS 281 |
| Go Make of All Disciples (ELLACOMBE) | CIS 6.28 |
| Joy to the World (G.F. Handel) | CBW 328 / SS 147 |
| A Living Hope (M. Guimont) | CBW 613 |
| New Creation (J. Francois) | SS 125 |
| On Jordan's Bank (WINCHESTER NEW) | CBW 351 |
| Songs of Thankfulness and Praise (SALZBURG) | CBW 348 |
| There is One Lord (J. Berthier) | CBW 530 / G 581 |
| Wade in the Water (African-American Spiritual) | G 583 |
| When Jesus Comes to Be Baptized (WINCHESTER NEW) | CBW 350 |
| You Have Anointed Me (M. Balhoff et al) | G 483 / GP 81 |

Rose Vestments

The calendar's assigned colours include the optional use of rose vestments on the Third Sunday of Advent and the Fourth Sunday of Lent. These Sundays are commonly called "Gaudete Sunday" and "Laetare Sunday," respectively, from the first word of the entrance antiphon (*introit*) of each. Both words tell us to rejoice, and as each season starts to look ahead to the joyful occasion to come soon, the rejoicing is shown by the lighter colour, taking a break from the violet of the rest of the season. It is understandable if a parish doesn't invest in vestments that will only be used twice a year. For those who do, however, it can be a nice touch to the celebration of the season, emphasizing that joy is always a feature of the liturgy, even in these seasons as well.

The Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath, usually with candles matching the colours of the vestments for the four Sundays of the season, has become an extraordinarily popular addition to our celebration of the season. It is not, however, officially part of the liturgy at all. It is a practice from domestic prayer, imported from our homes into our churches.

This leads to several considerations for how to use the Advent wreath. Firstly, our use of it can be very flexible. One might expect that it “must” have three violet and one rose candles, but that’s a later development: it can be the more traditional all-white candles as well, or the increasingly common white candles with violet and rose accents. It can be placed in the worship space itself, or it can be placed in the narthex or gathering space. Creativity is allowable and legitimate.

Secondly, because it is not actually part of the liturgy, there is no need to elaborate on it in the liturgy. A simple blessing of the wreath at the beginning of the season is fine, or merely lighting the candles during the entrance procession, or even having them lit ahead of time. The wreath can speak perfectly eloquently without explanations, blessings or other words every week, or some kind of Advent wreath song. These elaborations don’t add anything to a simple and beautiful symbol.

Credits:

Scripture commentary, reflections, and introduction to the gospel of Luke by Andrea Di Giovanni. Music suggestions by Janet Loo. Editing and other material by Rev. Michael Béchar and Christian McConnell. Copyright ©2021, Liturgy Office, Diocese of London. All rights reserved.