

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Isaiah 61:10-62:3**

<sup>61:10</sup> I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. <sup>11</sup> For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

<sup>62:1</sup> For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. <sup>2</sup> The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. <sup>3</sup> You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

**Commentary**

Israel declares he will not rest until Jerusalem's triumph is so visible that all the nations will see her victory and will call her by a new name. In the Bible, a name reveals one's essence. Remember how Abram and Sarai became Abraham and Sarah and how Jacob became Israel? A new name implies a new direction. Here, Jerusalem will forsake the sinful, destructive ways of her past. The new name for Jerusalem, Zion, is given by the prophet; but is really God's to give.

**Reflection**

If you were to choose a new name to reflect a new direction in your life, what might that be and what new name would represent it?

**Galatians 4:4-7**

<sup>4:4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as

children. <sup>6</sup> And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

### **Commentary**

Paul attempted to convince his newly founded churches that they should not shift their allegiance away from him to his opponents. The identity of these opponents is long debated. Some scholars identify them as Jewish Christians; others as Gentiles attracted to the Jewish faith. Some see them as missionary outsiders, others as resident Galatians. In any case, they were trying to persuade the Galatian Christians that they needed to be circumcised and follow the law to be saved. Paul wrote to prevent this shift.

### **Reflection**

How do you put yourself under a "law" or other rules in order to please God? Or are there other ways you go about doing this?

### **Luke 2:22-40**

<sup>2:22</sup> When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup> and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." <sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, <sup>29</sup> "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." <sup>33</sup> And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup> so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too." <sup>36</sup> There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup> At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. <sup>39</sup> When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

## Commentary

The closing story of Jesus' birth has at least three themes: first, the law is fulfilled; second, God's promise of salvation is realized; and third, God's saving acts through Jesus' ministry will be opposed. In his infancy narrative, Luke previews the gospel story. Luke notes several times in the birth story that the Jewish law was fulfilled. Jesus was circumcised at eight days old as required. Mary observes the purification law; Joseph fulfills the law of redemption of the firstborn male (1:21-24). The appropriate religious rituals and blessings are experienced in Jesus' presentation at the Temple. There is always a danger that religious observances can become empty ceremonies, deprived of deep meaning. In this passage, we see the power and significance of worship and devotion to God through the divinely appointed sacrifices and religious observances, recognizing the presence of God in daily life.

## Reflection

The Gospel stories abound with rituals. What makes the worship of the church sacred and meaningful in your life?

## Psalm 148

- <sup>148:1</sup> Praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!
- <sup>2</sup> **Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his host!**
- <sup>3</sup> Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!
- <sup>4</sup> **Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!**
- <sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for he commanded and they were created.
- <sup>6</sup> **He established them forever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.**
- <sup>7</sup> Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,
- <sup>8</sup> **fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!**
- <sup>9</sup> Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!
- <sup>10</sup> **Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!**

- <sup>11</sup> Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!
- <sup>12</sup> **Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!**
- <sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.
- <sup>14</sup> **He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his faithful,  
for the people of Israel who are close to him.  
Praise the LORD!**

### **Closing Prayer**

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**