

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 52:7-10

^{52:7} How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." ⁸ Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion. ⁹ Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Commentary

The long days of waiting and preparation are over at last. In the world of nature, the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere marks the beginning of the slow transition from long nights and short days to less darkness and more daylight. It is a sign of hope. In the church year, the twelve days of Christmastide is a time of joyous celebration, marking the end of Advent, and going toward Epiphany, the manifestation of God in our midst.—Emmanuel, God with us! This theme of arrival, expectation, and hope is expressed in this lection from Second Isaiah, which describes the coming of God to Zion.

Reflection

How beautiful it is to see the signs of a transition to better days. What signs have you seen of such transitions?

Hebrews 1:1-12

^{1:1} Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as

much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? ⁶ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." ⁷ Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire." ⁸ But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." ¹⁰ And, "In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; ¹¹ they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; ¹² like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end."

Commentary

This passage constitutes a single long sentence in Greek that introduces the themes of the entire letter, connects these with the Jewish tradition, and highlights the central place of Jesus Christ in fulfilling God's purposes for the world. The author (who is unknown) begins by reminding Hebrew readers of the messages God had given them in the past through their prophets—messages their forebears too often ignored.

Reflection

Which appeals to you more: the Baby Jesus in the manger, the earthly Jesus as teacher and healer, or the divine Christ who reigns eternally at God's right hand? Why? What does each aspect contribute to the church's teaching about Jesus Christ and his impact on personal lives in the human story?

John 1:1-14

^{1:1} In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Commentary

This first part of the passage is called the Prologue to the Gospel because it lays out the perspective from which the entire book is written. It gives a short synopsis of the Old Testament, from the Creation through the prophets to the last prophet, John the Baptist. The author's purpose is to present Jesus, not as a babe born in a manger or a Galilean teacher and healer and the promised Messiah, but as the human manifestation of God's creative, saving love. Those who have recognized him as Lord and Savior—the glory of God in the man of Jesus who walked among them—through him have been ushered into the very presence of God.

Reflection

How do you express what Jesus means to you in ways that appeal to those you know?

Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 98

- ^{98:1} O sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things.
His right hand and his holy arm
have gotten him victory.
- 2 The LORD has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.**
- ³ He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.
**All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.**
- ⁴ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.
- ⁵ Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
- 6 With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.**
- ⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.
- 8 Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the LORD,
for he is coming to judge the earth.**
- ⁹ **He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.**

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.**