

NATIVITY OF THE LORD; CHRISTMAS

Mass during the Day

Prayer

Psalm 98:1-6

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. The LORD has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

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. Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD

Reading the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 52:7-10

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."

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.



Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. 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.

Second Reading: Hebrews 1:1-6

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 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. 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, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

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"?

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

FIRST READING

Isaiah 52:7-10

PSALM

Psalm 98:1-6

SECOND READING

Hebrews 1:1-6

GOSPEL

John 1:1-5, 9-14

Gospel: John 1:1-5, 9-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

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.

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Hearing the Word

"Our God is King!"

The Christmas Season is about acknowledging, celebrating and reflecting on what God has done for believers through the gift of his Son. Sending Jesus into the world God endowed human life with meaning and purpose, uniting believers to himself and making them his people, his kingdom. The three readings of the Midday Mass of Christmas Day celebrate God's acts which can rightly be called the heart of the Good News.

The liturgy begins with a triumphant song from the book of Isaiah, the grandeur of which can only be understood in relation to the context in which the prophet pronounced the key phrase of the passage, "your God is King." The Israelites, from the beginning of their existence as a nation, acknowledged and celebrated God as their true king. And yet, at times they were not loyal to this king, and they suffered as a result of it. The passage we read from today was written in the context of utter and unparalleled disaster in the nation's long history. In 586 BC the kingdom of Judah was invaded by the Babylonians. The land and its cities were utterly destroyed, while majority of the people were carried off into slavery. With their country under occupation, their beloved city of Jerusalem in ruins, and their Temple turned into a heap of

ashes, the Israelites had little reason for celebrations. They lived in exile in Babylon for about 40 years, living on a vast, low-lying plain, between two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. This was the heart of the Babylonian Empire. To the east of this plain rises the mountainous region of Zargos. It is from these highlands that the news began to reach the enslaved people, the good news that a new power was rising to the East, the Persians. Under their leader, Cyrus, the Persians eventually overpowered the Babylonians, ended the exile, and allowed the Israelites to return to their country. Their leader, Cyrus the Great, would even help in rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. Isaiah recognised that this new king, when restoring the Israelites to their land, acted with God's prompting. Even though Cyrus was not an Israelite, he unknowingly executed God's will. When Isaiah looked to the mountains in the East, he saw the messengers carrying the good news of Cyrus's approach. He knew that liberation was at hand. No wonder he called for the ruins of Jerusalem to break out into a song of rejoicing. The desolate ruins of the beloved city were about to witness and experience what God's kingship truly means – the restoration and salvation of his people.

The author of the second reading celebrates another manifestation of God's king-

ship which expresses itself in God "speaking" the Good News: his Son. The writer begins his elaborate work called the letter to the Hebrews with an indication of the way in which God delivered the Good News. This time, the message of God's salvation would not be brought by the heralds coming over the mountains from the East, it would be brought directly from the heavenly world by God's own Son. The author emphasises that this Son of God is not merely somebody who resembles the Father. Like the Father, he is a creator and sustainer of the world. Being an exact "imprint" of the Father, the Son is God himself. Should there be any doubt of the Son's Divine identity, the author re-emphasises that he is infinitely superior to the angels, the heavenly beings who inhabit the supernatural world. The author goes to great lengths to emphasise that the communication brought by the Son is the perfect and fullest revelation of God Godself. The author also briefly indicates what the Son accomplished during his mission on earth – he purified God's people from their sins. In his revelatory work the Son thus reunited the people with their God. This is yet another type of restoration, even more significant than the rebuilding of the earthly city of Jerusalem which Isaiah had celebrated.

The magnificent opening lines of the Gospel of John build on the theme of the second reading, spelling out in detail the effects of God's Son's arrival in this world. John unambiguously identifies God's Son as Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17). As in the second reading, the author begins with an emphasis that Jesus is one with God, co-creator and sustainer of everything that is. He follows with details of Jesus' mission in the world describing him as the light. As the light, Jesus reveals God in his person. To make God visible was the essence of his mission and the purpose of his coming into the world (cf. Jn 1:18). To disclose the invisible God, Jesus, the divine being himself, became "flesh", that could be seen and directly experienced by other fellow human beings. The Good News that this Gospel passage celebrates is that God has descended into human flesh in order that humanity, without doubt or hesitancy, can know and understand God and God's ways. The rest of the Gospel of John will present various ways in which Jesus manifested God through his words and actions. The most significant part of that disclosure of God could be seen in Jesus' sacrificial death. Before his passion, Jesus said, "no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends ..." (Jn 15:13-14). Offering his life for the salvation of humanity, Jesus illustrated in the

best possible way that truth about God which Isaiah had celebrated 500 years earlier, "your God is King." God is the kind of king willing to offer himself for the people he holds as friends. In his life and in his body Jesus demonstrated that God the King will stop at nothing to bring salvation to his people.

The heart of the good news celebrated at Christmas, and so clearly presented by John the Evangelist, is that the faithful have the King who himself came down to earth in a human body, in order to bring them to union with himself, the union which gives eternal life. Isaiah saw the promise of this union in a vision of the restored Jerusalem, and the author of Hebrews proclaimed it describing God's ultimate communication with the world through his Son. When Christians celebrate Christmas, they declare that their God is indeed the King, echoing the call of the Psalmist, "with trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD."

Listening to the Word of God

One of the characteristics of our leaders today is that they are mostly distant and far from us. For example, they are always accompanied by bodyguards and, even when they travel by car crossing ordinary streets, there is a motorcade and a procession of cars in front

and behind them. Wealth, prestige and power define rulers of our time. Even the homes they live in are closely guarded, and only a few can come in and out freely. Of course, there are reasons for having security, but this relative isolation inevitably leads to a loss of the connections with ordinary people, those who are under their leadership. Since this is the dominant pattern of leadership that we experience today, it is hard to imagine that there is another type of leadership that is completely different. And yet, Christmas celebrations point our hopes in the right direction.

Because we hear and know the Christmas story so well, it is easy to miss the point about the type of ruler and king that has been given to us by God. Instead of coming with all the ceremony and show of power and wealth, the king we were given was born where no person, even the poorest of the poor, would choose to be born, that is in a stable, surrounded by the smell of animals and welcomed by the grunting of cows. In this low estate the king that God has given to us in Jesus went beyond the poorest of the poor to include all who are vulnerable, marginalized, despised and poor. Yet in this state, the richest and wisest persons came to honour Jesus at his birth because they recognized his kingship even in the midst of a stable – far from

the pomp and palaces of that time. These highly esteemed visitors gave up much to find Jesus and honour him as king, the one sent by God to be himself human in complete identification with all of humanity.

For the Creator of the Universe to come down in the person of Jesus in order to reach out to all persons, to enter into the human experience of daily life, to suffer and stand up for truth in a world of oppressive powers and powerful leaders, was an incredible act of love. Christmas is about a different kind of leadership, one that fully identifies through sacrifice and self-giving with humanity, in order to redeem and bring true freedom which comes through following the paths of God. As we respond to the invitation of Christmas to follow Jesus and embody his ways, we become different to the world in all we do and are. If we are leaders, we identify ourselves with those we lead as servants; as women, men, young and old we live our lives in solidarity with those who suffer in anyway, so that we bring the good news of the kingdom of God to them. It is a kingdom that is so radically different from everything we know and experience daily, that even those who lived during the time of Jesus could not recognize the coming of God in him..

Proverb

“The one who loves an unsightly person is the one who makes him beautiful”

Action

Self-examination

God chose to identify with us through Jesus. To what extent do I identify myself with others? In what ways?

How do I understand my role as a leader or a potential leader in a Christian community? How can I follow the pattern of God's kingship in my dealings with others?

Response to God

Even though we were far from God and sinners, God came down to meet and redeem us. We have a God who is like no ruler that we know, One who comes down to where we are, loves and transforms us to be beautiful. I will express my gratitude for this love through thanksgiving and praise.

Response to your World

I will choose one person or a group that I struggle with, and take one step to identify myself with them in love because of what God has done.

In our group we will identify people in our family, neighbourhood or community who are difficult to identify with and be in solidarity with. How can we reach out to them?

Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Prayer of St Francis of Assisi