

# THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS): NIGHT

Isaiah = I-ZAY-uh

Isaiah's words move straight from darkness to light in a joy-filled contrast. The words themselves are addressed to God, who is the "you" in this reading. As the reader of this passage, allow your voice to convey the gratitude and rejoicing that come with liberation.

The reading here shifts from talking to God to talking about the child. Now your tone can be more descriptive, focusing on what God has done and will do.

dominion = doh-MIN-yuhn

Give the familiar phrases plenty of space, and announce the names slowly and deliberately.

There are options for today's readings. Contact your parish staff to learn which readings will be used.

**READING I** One of the most powerful archetypal contrasts is the piercing of darkness by light. The readings for this Mass, occurring during one of the longest and darkest nights of the year in the northern hemisphere, proclaim the culmination of God's plan for salvation history as a light that pierces the darkness. And it is a child who embodies the light.

## LECTIONARY #14

READING I Isaiah 9:1-6

### A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

The people who walked in **darkness**  
have seen a great **light**;  
upon those who dwelt in the land of **gloom**  
a **light** has shone.  
You have brought them **abundant joy**  
and **great rejoicing**,  
as they rejoice before you as at the **harvest**,  
as people make **merry** when dividing **spoils**.  
For the **yoke** that burdened them,  
the **pole** on their shoulder,  
and the **rod** of their taskmaster  
you have **smashed**, as on the day of Midian.  
For every **boot** that **tramped in battle**,  
every **cloak rolled in blood**,  
will be **burned as fuel for flames**.  
For a **child** is born to us, a **son** is given us;  
upon his shoulder **dominion** rests.  
They name him **Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,**  
**Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.**

Isaiah of Jerusalem (eighth century BC) prophesied in an era of political and social darkness, and his message is primarily one of judgment. Still, there are passages of hope in Isaiah that pierce through the darkness. Indeed, Isaiah trusts so deeply in the Lord's faithfulness that he refuses to give judgment the final word. Rather, his oracles assert that the Lord will do something new, relying not on merit or on repentance, but rather on divine resolve.

In the verses preceding today's first reading, the prophet describes former times of "distress and darkness" (Isaiah

8:22) and then contrasts them with latter times, which he continues to do in today's readings. The darkness of former times under the failed reign of King Ahaz is scattered by a great light embodied by Ahaz's son, Hezekiah (a new David), whose reign made peace possible. Later Christian interpretation sees the dark former times as the period before the Christ, whose appearance as the light of the world marks the Lord's determination to do something wondrously new in the Davidic line.

The reading reflects its historical context in three ways that retain a strong hope

His dominion is **vast**  
and forever **peaceful**,  
from David's throne, and over his kingdom,  
which he **confirms** and **sustains**  
by **judgment** and **justice**,  
both **now** and **forever**.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 96:1–2, 2–3, 11–12, 13 (Luke 2:11)

**R. Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.**

Sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all you lands.  
Sing to the LORD; bless his name.

Announce his salvation, day after day.  
Tell his glory among the nations;  
among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice;  
let the sea and what fills it resound;  
let the plains be joyful and all that is  
in them!

Then shall all the trees of the forest exult.

They shall exult before the LORD,  
for he comes;  
for he comes to rule the earth.  
He shall rule the world with justice  
and the peoples with his constancy.

READING II Titus 2:11–14

**A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to Titus**

**Beloved:**

The grace of **God** has appeared, **saving** all  
and **training** us to **reject** godless ways and worldly desires  
and to live **temperately, justly, and devoutly** in this age,  
as we **await** the blessed **hope**,  
the **appearance** of the glory of our great God  
and savior **Jesus Christ**,  
who **gave** himself for us to **deliver** us from all lawlessness  
and to **cleanse** for himself a people as his **own**,  
**eager** to do what is **good**.

Titus = Ti-tuhs

This single-sentence reading is composed of three basic parts: God's grace saves and trains us, we wait in hope for Christ, and Christ's self-gift inspires us to do good. Keep these in mind as you plan your pacing and pauses, and try different emphases to best communicate these three parts.

for the future. First, it describes an image of Judah's people oppressed by the dark imperial might of Assyria, but now illuminated by a great light and filled with a joy comparable to that of harvest and the merriment of dividing spoils. Second, it describes the transformation that will be accomplished by military means: the smashing of yoke, pole, and rod recalls Gideon's miraculous victory over Midian (Judges 6–7). Finally, the reading reflects on the one who will accomplish these things on God's behalf, identifying a child who is an heir to David's throne. This

Davidic heir is granted titles that proclaim his qualifications. He will have wisdom, military power and might, generativity, and the ability to bring peace. Ultimately, it is the Lord's zeal that makes this limitless future of peace and justice possible.

**READING II** The Letter to Titus is one of three closely related letters (with 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy) that are referred to as the Pastoral Epistles. Paul's authorship of these letters is questioned for many reasons, especially due to their context, which seems to be located some

twenty years after Paul's death. But whether Paul authored them or not, they are firmly rooted in the Pauline tradition.

The second chapter of Titus begins and ends with Paul's exhortation to Titus to teach sound doctrine. Between these instructions are two sections of material. First, Paul instructs Titus to teach all groups (young and old, men and women, and slaves) about proper interactions, with an eye toward being acceptable in society's eyes (Titus 2:2–10). Second, Paul justifies this exhortation with a creedal statement that recalls the past, informs the present,

Caesar Augustus = See-zehr aw-GUHS-tuhs  
 A storytelling style is proper here, especially since some in the assembly will have these words nearly memorized.  
 Quirinius = kwih-RIN-ee-uhs

Nazareth = NAZ-uh-rehth  
 Judea = joo-DEE-uh or joo-DAY-uh

Describe this loving action with tenderness. Later in the reading, the angel promises that the presence of the swaddled infant in the manger will be "a sign" for the shepherds.

GOSPEL Luke 2:1-14

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke**

In **those** days a **decree** went out from Caesar Augustus that the **whole world** should be enrolled.

This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

So **all** went to be enrolled, each to his own town.

And **Joseph too** went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth

to Judea, to the city of **David** that is called **Bethlehem**, because he was of the **house and family of David**, to be enrolled with **Mary**, his **betroted**, who was with **child**.

**While** they were there, the **time came** for her to have her child, and she gave **birth** to her firstborn **son**.

She **wrapped** him in swaddling clothes and **laid** him in a **manger**,

because there was **no room** for them in the inn.

Now there were **shepherds** in that region living in the fields and keeping the **night watch** over their flock.

The **angel of the Lord** appeared to them and the **glory of the Lord** shone around them, and they were **struck** with great fear.

The angel said to them,

**"Do not be afraid,**  
 for **behold**, I proclaim to you **good news of great joy** that will be for **all** the people.

For **today** in the city of David

a **savior** has been born for you who is **Christ and Lord**.

and looks with hope to the future (Titus 2:11-14).

The second section, which is today's reading, is framed by two appearances. The grace of God (i.e., Jesus Christ) has already appeared bringing salvation. That first appearance guides the behavior of Titus' flock "in this age" to reject godless and worldly behavior and to embody a devout and upright life. The community's ability to live devoutly comes from Jesus' teaching, and even more importantly, from his saving death. All of these things point to the hoped-for second appearance of "the

glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ." While today's Mass joyfully celebrates the first appearance, it also waits in hope for the second.

**GOSPEL** Luke provides an account of Jesus' birth that contains parallels that are factually different from Matthew even as they serve a similar purpose. For example, Matthew's Joseph and Mary live in Bethlehem, and there is little detail regarding the child's birth. In contrast, Luke's Joseph and Mary live in Nazareth, and his account of the birth is more descriptive.

But in the end, each Gospel claims that the child is born in Bethlehem.

Luke's birth narrative (2:1-20) has three scenes: a description of the setting and the birth (verses 1-7), the annunciation to the shepherds (verses 8-14), and the various reactions to the news (verses 15-20). Tonight's Gospel contains the first two scenes. The census, despite questions regarding its historical authenticity, argues that Caesar, the highest authority in the empire, facilitated the fulfillment of salvation history by ordering Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, thus providing the needed

Pause after the word “angel” rather than after the phrase “praising God and saying,” so that the idea of praise is verbally connected to the familiar words “Glory to God . . . .”

And this will be a **sign** for you:  
 you will find an **infant** wrapped in swaddling clothes  
 and lying in a **manger**.”  
 And **suddenly** there was a **multitude** of the heavenly host with  
 the angel,  
**praising** God and saying:  
 “**Glory to God** in the **highest**  
 and on earth **peace** to those on whom his **favor rests**.”

opportunity for the child to be born there. The lack of lodging identifies Mary, Joseph, and the child as homeless migrants, a parallel that Matthew developed in their flight to Egypt. And the swaddled child lying in a manger is both a sign and an embodiment of tender care in the face of need.

The second scene also provides important theological messages. It focuses on the angelic annunciation to the shepherds, a group that, because of their status, would not normally be considered worthy of receiving such a message. Their counterparts in Matthew are the Magi, who

also could be considered unworthy because of their identity to receive a divine message (from the sign of the star). The appearance of the angel in Luke employs the “annunciation pattern” that can be seen elsewhere in Scripture: first, the angel’s appearance prompts fear; then there is an instruction not to fear; and finally, there is the message and the promise of a sign. With the words from Isaiah in the first reading in mind—“For a child is born to us, a son is given us”—we hear anew the angel’s message proclaiming the Good News: “For today . . . a savior has

been born for you.” Instead of titles that describe the qualities of the promised leader in Isaiah, the angel in Luke declares the identity of this child: savior, Christ, and Lord. This second scene concludes when heaven touches earth in the canticle of the heavenly host: “Glory to God in the highest!” The night’s darkness pierced by light invites us to wordless wonder and awe. S.L.