

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS): VIGIL

LECTIONARY #13

READING I Isaiah 62:1-5

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

For Zion's sake I **will not be silent**,
for Jerusalem's sake I **will not be quiet**,
until her **vindication shines forth** like the dawn
and her **victory** like a **burning torch**.

Nations shall behold your **vindication**,
and all the **kings** your **glory**;
you shall be called by a **new name**
pronounced by the **mouth** of the **LORD**.
You shall be a **glorious crown** in the hand of the **LORD**,
a **royal diadem** held by your **God**.

No more shall people call you "**Forsaken**,"
or your land "**Desolate**,"
but you shall be called "**My Delight**,"
and your land "**Espoused**."

For the **LORD** **delights** in you
and makes your land his **spouse**.

As a young man **marries** a virgin,
your **Builder** shall marry **you**;
and as a bridegroom **rejoices** in his bride
so shall your **God** rejoice in **you**.

Isaiah = ī-ZAY-uh

Zion = Zī-uhn or Zī-ahn

Use a confident voice to proclaim Isaiah's prophecy.

vindication = vihnh-dih-KAY-shuhn

Emphasize the word "you" in both occurrences here. Also accentuate the words of God's promise: "new name," "glorious crown," and "royal diadem."

diadem = Dī-uh-dem

The contrast here is stunning. Pause briefly after each of these names, both negative and positive.

Give your emphasis in this last section to the words that relate to marriage.

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

READING I Moving from the fourth Sunday of Advent, which focused on the one to be born (ruler/shepherd, priest/sacrifice, Lord), the readings for the vigil of Christmas invite us to expand our scope and reflect upon that person's place in salvation history. *Now* is the moment when all that God has planned comes to fruition.

Isaiah, one of Israel's three major prophets, is often called the prophet of the Christmas message. It is thought that the insights of Isaiah of Jerusalem (active 742-690 bc) led to an "Isaian school" that continued the prophet's tradition for over 200 years (742-520 bc). While many themes unite Isaiah's perspective in different historical eras, his constant focus is the sovereignty of the Lord whose passion for justice is tempered by a faithful and comforting gentleness.

Jerusalem (Zion), the particular focus of the Lord's attention throughout Isaiah,

has experienced it all, from judgment to comfort in exile to healing restoration. Following the Lord's comfort to Israel in exile (Isaiah 40-55), Isaiah 60-62 recalls how the Lord returns the exiles to their city. Breaking his long silence, God poetically cries out regarding Jerusalem's mistreatment by the nations (Isaiah 62:1-12; see also Isaiah 42:14). In his justice, God has had enough of Zion's humiliation, and now is the moment for a sweet and tender vindication and victory that is neither subtle nor hidden. Rather, it will be observed by nations and kings.

For meditation and context:

Antioch = AN-tee-ahk
 Pisidia = pih-SID-ee-uh
 Paul's proclamation of the Good News tells the story of salvation.

sojourn = SOH-jehrn

The reading grows more complex here with quotations inside a quotation. Pause both before and after the phrase "of him he testified" and again before and after the phrase "he would say."

Rejecting former names, "Forsaken" and "Desolate," the Lord (the bridegroom) gives Israel new names, "My Delight" and "Espoused." The people and their land, taken as one whole, are the bride/spouse in whom the Lord delights. The prophet gives voice to God's determination to break the silence now and to assert that God is righting an ancient wrong by restoring the divine-human relationship. Best expressed as a joyful marriage, this text connects the fulfillment of salvation history with Christmas.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 89:4–5, 16–17, 27, 29 (2a)

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

<p>I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: forever will I confirm your posterity and establish your throne for all generations.</p> <p>Blessed the people who know the joyful shout; in the light of your countenance, O LORD, they walk.</p>	<p>At your name they rejoice all the day, and through your justice they are exalted.</p> <p>He shall say of me, "You are my father, my God, the rock, my savior." Forever I will maintain my kindness toward him, and my covenant with him stands firm.</p>
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READING II Acts of the Apostles 13:16–17, 22–25

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

When Paul reached Antioch in Pisidia and entered the synagogue, he **stood up, motioned** with his **hand**, and said, "Fellow Israelites and you others who are God-fearing, **listen**. The God of this people Israel **chose our ancestors** and exalted the people during their sojourn in the land of Egypt. With **uplifted arm** he led them **out** of it. Then he removed Saul and **raised up David** as king; of him he testified, 'I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after **my own heart**; he will carry out my **every wish**.' From this man's descendants **God**, according to his **promise**, has brought to Israel a **savior, Jesus**. John **heralded his coming** by proclaiming a **baptism of repentance** to all the people of Israel; and as John was completing his course, he would say, 'What do you **suppose** that I am? **I am not he**. **Behold, one is coming** after me; I am not **worthy** to unfasten the sandals of his feet.'"

READING II

In writing the Acts of the Apostles, Luke continues the logical progression begun in his Gospel. The ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the rejected prophet and savior of his people, continues through the community that gathers in his name. Early Christians imitated Jesus' preaching and teaching, his great deeds of power, and his sacrificial death, convinced in their belief that Jesus is the fulfillment of salvation history.

Through their speeches in Acts, Peter, Stephen, and Paul review the elements that make up God's salvific plan. The second

reading, drawn from Paul's missionary work in Pisidian Antioch, recalls his preaching in the synagogue in imitation of Jesus, who preached in the synagogue in Capernaum (Luke 4:14–30). And like Jesus, Paul is rejected.

Relating Jesus' origins to salvation history, Peter had earlier traced Jesus to the promise made to David (Acts 2:29–30), whereas Stephen located Jesus in the promises to the patriarchs (Acts 7:2–18). Now, for his part, Paul begins with God choosing the Israelites in Egypt. After extolling God's might in the Exodus, the wilder-

genealogy = jee-nee-AL-uh-jee or jee-nee-OL-uh-jee

The rhythm and motion of this lengthy genealogy are more important than perfect pronunciation. Do practice the names, however, so you can proclaim them confidently!

Judah = JQQ-duh

Perez = PEE-rihz or PAYR-ez

Zerah = ZEER-uh

Tamar = TAY-mahr

Hezron = HEZ-ruhn

Ram = ram

Amminadab = uh-MIN-uh-dab

Nahshon = NAH-shon or NAH-shuhn

Salmon = SAL-muhn

Boaz = BOH-az

Rahab = RAY-hab

Obed = OH-bihd

Jesse = JES-ee

Uriah = yoo-Ri-uh

Rehoboam = ree-huh-BOH-uhm

Abijah = uh-Bi-juh

Asaph = AY-saf

Jehoshaphat = jeh-HOH-shuh-fat

Joram = JOHR-uhm

Uzziah = uh-Zi-uh

Jotham = JOH-thuhm

Ahaz = AY-haz

Hezekiah = hehz-eh-Ki-uh

ness, the conquest of the land, and the judges (Acts 13:18–21, omitted in today's reading), Paul finally arrives at and reflects upon the kingship of David. It is in David that Paul finds Jesus' explicit origin. Paul's description of David alludes to a combination of three Old Testament texts: Psalm 89:21 extolls David as God's chosen one, 1 Samuel 13:14 identifies David as "a man after his [God's] own heart," and Isaiah 44:28 describes an individual who carries out what God desires. Paul concludes that Jesus, who is the descendant (literally "seed," in Greek) of David, is Israel's savior.

GOSPEL Matthew 1:1–25

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

The book of the **genealogy** of **Jesus Christ**,
the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham became the father of **Isaac**,

Isaac the father of **Jacob**,

Jacob the father of **Judah** and his **brothers**.

Judah became the father of **Perez** and **Zerah**,
whose mother was **Tamar**.

Perez became the father of **Hezron**,

Hezron the father of **Ram**,

Ram the father of **Amminadab**.

Amminadab became the father of **Nahshon**,

Nahshon the father of **Salmon**,

Salmon the father of **Boaz**,

whose mother was **Rahab**.

Boaz became the father of **Obed**,

whose mother was **Ruth**.

Obed became the father of **Jesse**,

Jesse the father of **David** the king.

David became the father of **Solomon**,

whose mother had been the **wife** of **Uriah**.

Solomon became the father of **Rehoboam**,

Rehoboam the father of **Abijah**,

Abijah the father of **Asaph**.

Asaph became the father of **Jehoshaphat**,

Jehoshaphat the father of **Joram**,

Joram the father of **Uzziah**.

Uzziah became the father of **Jotham**,

Jotham the father of **Ahaz**,

Ahaz the father of **Hezekiah**. >>

Having proved his argument through an appeal to Scripture, Paul further supports his point by moving to the recent testimony of John the Baptist. Lest some may speculate that John might be the one, Paul recalls that John himself corrected such speculation by declaring that he had come in advance to prepare the way and that he was not worthy to unfasten the sandals of the promised one. John's humble deference before Jesus solidifies Paul's argument that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises.

GOSPEL

Matthew's infancy narrative was crafted to appeal to and instruct his Jewish Christian community and growing Gentile membership. Composed around AD 85, Matthew employs popular Jewish literary forms, such as genealogies, quotations from the Old Testament (called "fulfillment quotations"), echoes of earlier biblical figures (like Joseph and Moses), and more. All of this was done to convince his fellow believers that Jesus was truly the fulfillment of all that had been promised.

Manasseh = muh-NAS-uh
 Amos = AY-m*s
 Josiah = joh-Si-uh
 Jechoniah = jek-oh-Ni-uh

Shealtiel = shee-AL-tee-uhl
 Zerubbabel = zuh-ROQB-uh-b*
 Abiud = uh-Bi-uhd
 Eliakim = ee-Li-uh-kihm
 Azor = AY-zohr
 Zadok = ZAD-uhk or ZAY-dok
 Achim = AY-kihm
 Eliud = ee-Li-uhd
 Eleazar = el-ee-AY-zehr
 Matthan = MATH-uhn

Help the assembly to hear that these generations bring us right up to the birth of Jesus. Attach the word "Now" quickly to the final phrase of the genealogy instead of pausing between the genealogy and the nativity story.

Hezekiah became the father of **Manasseh**,
Manasseh the father of **Amos**,
Amos the father of **Josiah**.
Josiah became the father of **Jechoniah** and his **brothers**
 at the time of the **Babylonian exile**.

After the Babylonian exile,
Jechoniah became the father of **Shealtiel**,
Shealtiel the father of **Zerubbabel**,
Zerubbabel the father of **Abiud**.
Abiud became the father of **Eliakim**,
Eliakim the father of **Azor**,
Azor the father of **Zadok**.
Zadok became the father of **Achim**,
Achim the father of **Eliud**,
Eliud the father of **Eleazar**.
Eleazar became the father of **Matthan**,
Matthan the father of **Jacob**,
Jacob the father of **Joseph**, the husband of **Mary**.
 Of her was born **Jesus** who is called the **Christ**.

Thus the total number of generations
 from **Abraham** to **David**
 is **fourteen** generations;
 from **David** to the **Babylonian exile**,
fourteen generations;
 from the **Babylonian exile** to the **Christ**,
fourteen generations.

[Now this is how the **birth of Jesus Christ** came about.
 When his mother **Mary** was **betrothed** to **Joseph**,
 but **before** they lived together,
 she was found with **child** through the **Holy Spirit**.
Joseph her husband, since he was a **righteous man**,
 yet **unwilling to expose her to shame**,
 decided to divorce her **quietly**.

Today's Gospel, consisting of the entire first chapter of Matthew, can be divided into a title (1:1), a genealogy (1:2–17) and the story of Jesus' conception (1:18–25). While the rest of Matthew's Gospel will testify to the truth of the title, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham," the words of the title are revelatory on their own as well. For example, the word "genealogy" (*genesis* in Greek) is richly suggestive. The word *genesis* (origin or birth) surely recalls the biblical book, but the repetition of the same word in Matthew 1:18, translated there as

"birth," makes it clear that birth is the best interpretation of the term at this point, implying something like a birth record. And whose birth is recounted? None other than Jesus (whose name means Savior in Greek) Christ (Messiah/Anointed One in Greek), who is identified as the son of David and of Abraham. The genealogy that follows will prove Jesus' lineage as a Jew of the house of Judah and a descendant of David. Other parts of Matthew's infancy narrative (especially the account of the Magi in Matthew 2:1–12) will link Jesus with Abraham, the

father of all who believe. Thus, Jesus will be the savior of the Jews and of all the nations.

While Matthew's genealogy relies, to some extent, on earlier Old Testament genealogies, its purpose is more theological than historical. By proving Jesus' Davidic ancestry, the genealogy shows that his birth is the culmination of God's story of salvation. It is divided into three segments of fourteen generations: The first segment (Abraham to David) produces the Davidic line; the second (the kings of the Davidic line to Jechoniah) concludes that, despite the exile, a Davidic heir was produced;

A calm, assuring tone for these instructions will communicate the angel's comfort and Joseph's obedience.

Such was his **intention** when, behold,
 the **angel of the Lord** appeared to him in a dream and said,
 "Joseph, son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.
 For it is through the **Holy Spirit**
 that this **child** has been **conceived** in her.
 She will bear a **son** and you are to name him **Jesus**,
 because he will **save his people** from their sins."
All this took place to fulfill
 what the **Lord** had said through the prophet:
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,
 which means "**God is with us.**"
 When Joseph awoke,
 he **did** as the angel of the Lord had commanded him
 and took his **wife** into his **home**.
 He had no relations with her until **she bore a son**,
 and he named him **Jesus**.]

[Shorter: Matthew 1:18–25 (see brackets)]

and the third (Shealtiel to Joseph) leads to the appearance of the final anointed one (the Christ, that is, the Messiah). The striking appearance of five women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba ("the wife of Uriah"), and Mary) likely highlights the unusual role they played in God's plan, for there was something irregular in their unions with their partners.

The final section of today's Gospel reading gives a brief account of Jesus' conception. It focuses on Joseph, the husband of Mary, whose wife is found to be with child, a situation that is irregular, to say the

least. Joseph has a dream in which the Lord's angel explains the divine plan unfolding in Mary. It is a plan that involves Joseph as well; he is to name the child, thus accepting Jesus (and Mary) into his line and his home. The angel explains by referencing in this present reading the Septuagint translation (the Greek version of the Old Testament) of Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel." Although the original Hebrew and Greek versions of this prophecy in Isaiah clearly indicate that it was not making a prediction for a distant

future, but rather was commenting on the political situation of its time, Matthew views it as relevant to the current unfolding of salvation history. For Matthew, the text identifies Jesus as both the son of David and the son of God (through the Holy Spirit). Faithful and righteous, Joseph of the house of David heeds the words of the angel and cooperates with the divine plan. S.L.