

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS): DAY

Isaiah = ī-ZAY-uh

This Christmas Day, you are, like Isaiah, “announcing salvation” to the gathered assembly. Use a resonant and joyful tone.

Zion = Zī-uhn or Zī-ahn

Here, the reading shifts to the way the people should respond to this good news. Build your emphasis through this section.

Proclaim this final section with a strong sense of declaration, announcing God’s holy and saving power.

LECTIONARY #16

READING I Isaiah 52:7–10

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

How **beautiful** upon the mountains
are the feet of him who **brings glad tidings**,
announcing **peace**, bearing **good news**,
announcing **salvation**, and saying to Zion,
“Your **God is King!**”

Hark! Your sentinels raise a **cry**,
together they shout for **joy**,
for they see directly, **before their eyes**,
the **LORD restoring Zion**.

Break out together in song,
O ruins of Jerusalem!

For the **LORD comforts** his people,
he **redeems Jerusalem**.

The **LORD has bared his holy arm**
in the sight of all the nations;
all the ends of the earth will behold
the **salvation of our God**.

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

READING I Whereas the Christmas vigil Mass focused on the birth of the child against the backdrop of God’s salvation history, this final Christmas Mass ponders the identity of the child against the backdrop of cosmic history. These final readings proclaim that the newborn child will have cosmic significance.

Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55) comes 160 years after the time of Isaiah of

Jerusalem. With Isaiah’s theological instincts, this anonymous prophet communicates God’s consolation to exiled Judah. God comforts Judah with the claim that Babylon has been defeated and that Judah is free to return home triumphantly. This claim, exemplified in today’s first reading, is “good news” (*basār* in Hebrew) for the hopeless and humiliated exiles in Babylon.

Isaiah 52:1–12 (of which today’s reading is a part) literally serves as a wake-up call to the exiles. It comprises four units. The first (52:1–2) arouses dulled and inattentive Israel with commands to awake and

arise. The second unit (52:3–6) offers key insights from Israel’s history of being oppressed, especially under Egypt and Assyria, and how God is determined to reclaim the people. The third (today’s reading, 52:7–10) describes God’s current undertaking by relating how certain groups will act in response to what God is doing. First, the one who bears good news (*basār*) will declare an event of unheard newness: Israel’s God-King has defeated Babylon, making way for unprecedented salvation and peace. Second, sentinels will hear the message, spread it, and witness the return

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 98:1, 2–3, 3–4, 5–6 (3c)

R. All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wondrous deeds;
his right hand has won victory for him,
his holy arm.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation by our God.
Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
break into song; sing praise.

The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed
his justice.

Sing praise to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and melodious song.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
sing joyfully before the King, the LORD.

He has remembered his kindness and his
faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

READING II Hebrews 1:1–6

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

Brothers and sisters:

In times **past**, **God spoke** in partial and various ways
to our **ancestors** through the **prophets**;
in **these last days**, he has spoken to us through the **Son**,
whom he made heir of **all things**
and through whom he created the **universe**,
who is the **refulgence** of his **glory**,
the very **imprint** of his **being**,
and who sustains **all things** by his **mighty word**.
When he had accomplished purification from **sins**,
he took his seat at the right hand of the **Majesty on high**,
as **far superior** to the **angels**
as the **name** he has inherited is more **excellent**
than **theirs**. >>

Hebrews = HEE-brōoz

Here we have a didactic reading that is also a study in comparisons, especially of past to present and of the Son to the prophets and angels. The meaning of this reading will be more accessible to your listeners if you proclaim it with these comparisons in mind for emphasis and linking.

refulgence = rih-FUHL-j*nts

of the King to Zion, thus making Zion the center of divine power. Third, the defeated people (the “ruins of Jerusalem”) will break into song. Fourth, the Lord comforts and redeems, he bares his arm in power and saves, and all the nations now know it. Following today’s reading, the fourth and final unit (52:11–12) complements the first (awake and arise) with more action: “Depart, depart. . . . For the LORD goes before you” (Isaiah 52:11, 12). This text inspired early Christians to see the good news in both the birth of the Child-King and his universal salvation.

READING II

The anonymous Letter to the Hebrews, written in the last third of the first century to Italian Christians, is a rich source of reflection on Christ’s role as priest and sacrifice. These identities of Christ are grounded in his most basic identity: Son and heir. It is that identity which concerns today’s second reading.

First, the author affirms that throughout the ages God has used “partial and various ways” (*polymerōs* and *polytropōs* in Greek) to speak, especially through the prophets. Then, tying together past, present, and future, the author contrasts those

many and various forms of speech with the singular communication of these “last days,” spoken through the Son. Two features distinguish this Son from all who have gone before him: he is the “heir of all things” and God “created the universe” through him.

Having established the Son’s superiority to the prophets, the author continues to magnify the Son’s identity. Drawing from the image in the Book of Wisdom that describes Wisdom as a “reflection of eternal light” (Wisdom 7:26), Hebrews declares that the Son reflects God’s glory and, while separate, is also “the very imprint of his

Distinguish clearly between the introduction to each quotation and the quotations themselves by pausing judiciously. Don't rush the introductory phrases, as they provide context for the quotations.

Your task here is to help John's profound theology shine through this familiar, almost musical, language. In this initial sentence, accentuate the words in bold. Take your time.

Contrast "life" and "light" with darkness, making the most of John's imagery, poetry, and mystery.

Here, the contrast is a somber one between the "true light" and the way the world received that light, with the emphasis on those who believed. Consider those who are listening; they are also called to believe.

[God's] being." Due to his role in creation, the Son joins the Creator in keeping all things in existence. Finally, the author identifies the Son's definitive task, to accomplish "purification from sins," which he will effect as priest and sacrifice. In accomplishing this, the Son is far above even the angels and is seated at the right hand of God.

The author uses a set of scriptural texts to prove the Son's superiority in being and name over the angels. The first two citations, Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14, identify the Son with the royal anointed one and the promise to David, thus implying

For to which of the **angels** did **God** ever say:

You are my son; this day I have begotten you?

Or again:

*I will be a **father** to him, and he shall be a **son** to me?*

And **again**, when he leads the firstborn into the world, he says:

*Let **all the angels of God worship** him.*

GOSPEL John 1:1–18

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

[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 to be through him,
and without him **nothing** came to be.

What **came to be** through him was **life**,
and this **life** was the **light** of the **human race**;
the light **shines** in the darkness,
and the darkness has **not** overcome it.]

A man named **John** was **sent** from **God**.

He came for **testimony**, to **testify** to the light,
so that all might **believe** through him.

He was **not** the light,
but came to **testify** to the light.

[The **true** light, which enlightens **everyone**,
was **coming** into the **world**.

He was **in the world**,
and the world came to be through **him**,
but the world **did not know** him.

He **came** to what was his **own**,
but his own people **did not accept** him.

that the anointed heir is superior to the angels. The third citation, from Psalm 97:7 (Psalm 96:7 in the Septuagint translation), shows the angels worshipping the exalted Son. Thus, this passage helps to clarify why early Christians had no doubt that the exalted Son is Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL Coming from the tradition of the Beloved Disciple, John's Gospel stands in striking contrast to the Synoptic Gospels. Emerging around AD 95 from the Johannine churches around

Ephesus, John offers a powerful theological reflection on the person of Christ.

Today's Gospel, referred to as the Prologue, synthesizes John's Christology and theology. Whereas Matthew and Luke develop Jesus' identity through infancy narratives that use quasi-factual traditions surrounding Jesus' birth, John's prologue begins with preexistence, creation, and the story of the human condition as it approaches the incarnation. It concludes with the reception of the incarnate Word (*Logos* in Greek). Within the prologue, John the Baptist makes two appearances. With

John's testimony is rich but difficult to understand, even though the words themselves seem plain enough. As you study these words, remember that the assembly will hear them only once. The Baptist points us to Christ, who gives the gift of grace and reveals the Father.

But to those who **did** accept him
 he gave power to become **children of God**,
 to those who **believe** in his name,
 who were born **not** by natural generation
nor by human choice **nor** by a man's decision
but of God.

And the **Word** became **flesh**
 and made his dwelling among us,
 and **we** saw his **glory**,
 the glory as of the Father's **only Son**,
 full of **grace and truth.**]

John testified to him and **cried out**, saying,

"**This** was he of whom I said,
 'The one who is coming **after** me ranks **ahead** of me
 because he existed **before** me.'"

From his fullness we have all received,

grace in place of grace,
 because while the law was given through Moses,
grace and truth came through **Jesus Christ**.

No one has **ever seen** God.

The only Son, **God**, who is at the Father's **side**,
 has **revealed** him.

[Shorter: John 1:1–5, 9–14 (see brackets)]

echoes of Luke's parallels between John and Jesus, we read that just as Jesus (the "true light") is coming into the world to enlighten everyone, John was sent by God to offer testimony to the light. And as in the other Gospels, the author clarifies that Jesus (the Word) ranks ahead of John because Jesus existed first.

In its famous opening line—"In the beginning"—the prologue evokes the creation of Genesis 1:1. But while Genesis focused on the origins of all things, John's prologue strives to develop the relationship between God and the Word, identifying

Jesus Christ (first mentioned by name toward the very end of today's reading) as the Word, the Life, and the True Light that became incarnate ("became flesh"). The author meticulously distinguishes God and the incarnate Word, for all is leading toward the relationship between Father and Son: "The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side has revealed him."

Three human groupings root this prologue in human history. First is John the Baptist, who testified to the one he calls light. Second, the prologue recalls that the world did not know the true light, so much

so that "his own people did not accept him." Third, those who did accept him received "power to become children of God." As such, they received two gifts: the Law given through Moses and the truth through Jesus Christ. The prologue of John describes how the Johannine Christians saw more in the incarnation than a child; they saw cosmic significance of the Son. S.L.