

Sunday, December 31, 2023

First Sunday of Christmas, Year B

Introduction

The psalmist calls on the natural world, celestial bodies, fire and earth, creatures, and all humanity, to praise God. The voices of Simeon and 84-year-old Anna join the chorus today, recognizing what God is doing in Jesus. Simeon's song is often sung after communion, for we have seen God's salvation in the assembled community and have held Jesus in our hands in the bread. Then, like the prophet Anna, we tell of Jesus to all who look for the healing of the world.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and yet more wonderfully restored it. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

First Reading: Isaiah 61:10--62:3

To the people who returned to Jerusalem after the exile, the prophet proclaims that God's salvation will fully come to pass. Jerusalem will become a shining light to the nations and righteousness and praise will spring up as surely as the earth puts forth vegetation.

A reading from Isaiah.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

^{62:1}For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.
²The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.
³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Psalm: Psalm 148

Let us read the Psalm responsively.

¹Hallelujah! Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise God in the heights.
²**Praise the LORD, all you angels;
sing praise, all you hosts of heaven.**
³Praise the LORD, sun and moon;
sing praise, all you shining stars.
⁴**Praise the LORD, heaven of heavens,
and you waters above the heavens.**
⁵Let them praise the name of the LORD,
who commanded, and they were created,
⁶**who made them stand fast forever and ever,
giving them a law that shall not pass away.**
⁷Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps;
⁸**fire and hail, snow and fog,
tempestuous wind, doing God's will;**
⁹mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars;
¹⁰**wild beasts and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds;**
¹¹sovereigns of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the world;

¹²**young men and maidens,
old and young together.**

¹³Let them praise the name of the LORD,
whose name only is exalted, whose splendor is over earth and heaven.

¹⁴**The LORD has raised up strength for the people and praise for all faithful
servants,
the children of Israel, a people who are near the LORD. Hallelujah!**

Second Reading: Galatians 4:4-7

Paul seeks to show the Galatians that the purpose of Christ's birth was to liberate us from the law's condemnation so that we would be fully adopted into God's family as beloved children.

A reading from Galatians.

⁴When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel: Luke 2:22-40

Luke's narrative continues with stories that emphasize Jesus' connection to Judaism. His family is devout in its observance of the law, and Jesus himself is recognized as one who will bring glory to Israel.

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

²²When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, [Joseph and Mary] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he

would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel."

³³And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.