

Christmas 1

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December 29, 2002

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you have made yourself known in your Son, Jesus, redeemer of the world. We pray that his birth as a human child will set us free from the old slavery of our sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever

Or

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

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

{10} I 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. {11} For 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. {2} The 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. {3} You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Chapters 56-66 constitute "Third Isaiah," "a collection of pieces from different authors, united as a continuation of Isaiah and exhibiting a community of theme and situation." [1] It is from the period of the restoration from captivity.

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 is the lesson for Advent 3, Year B; and Isaiah 62:1-5 is the lesson for Epiphany 2, Year C. This pericope is a composite of parts of two Isaianic units, 61:1-11 and 62:1-12.

10: The speaker is the anointed one of 61:1 sent to bring good news to the poor, now clothed by God with righteousness and salvation. [2]

11: The emergence of righteousness and praise are likened to the blooming of flowers.

62:1. For Zion's sake I will not rest: The speaker is the prophet. He declares his/her intent to plead for a reversal of Yahweh's judgment on the city.

2: Then the restoration of Jerusalem will be seen by the nations "like a flaming torch."

You shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give: "Zion is to receive a new name to symbolize the dramatic change the phrase 'new name' (*šem hadaš*) only occurs here. No more called 'Forsaken' or Desolate,' but 'I delight in Her (*Hephzibah*) and "Married" (*Beulah*) [see verse 4]." [3] For other references to a new name for the restored Jerusalem see Isaiah 60:14 and Ezekiel 53:35.

3. You shall be a crown of beauty...a royal diadem: In 61:3 the captives are to be given "a crown instead of dust." Now, having been restored, Jerusalem will be Yahweh's crown, the vision of his glory on earth.

Psalm 148

{1} Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! {2} Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! {3} Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! {4} Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! {5} Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. {6} He established them forever and ever; he fixed

their bounds, which cannot be passed. {7} Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, {8} fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! {9} Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! {10} Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! {11} Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! {12} Young men and women alike, old and young together! {13} Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. {14} He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the LORD!

Psalm 148 is used each year for the First Sunday after Christmas, and also for the Fifth Sunday of Easter in year C. It is one of the Hallelujah Psalms (Psalms 113-118, 146-150).

1-6: Since Yahweh created the heavens as well as the earth the heavenly world is called on to praise him.

5. you waters above the heavens: In Genesis 1:7 God made a "dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome."

6. he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed: In Job 38:8 God refers to the boundaries that hold back the chaotic waters of the ocean of heaven. [4]

7-14: The second part of the Psalm calls for praise "from the earth." Everything from sea monsters to "old and young together" are called on to praise the name of Yahweh.

11-12: "It is not 'the human being' who appears here as a single unity, but here too a hierarchical order is introduced: kings and nations (v. 1 *sic* [11]), high officials and all judges of the earth. The first classification refers to offices, the second in v. 12 to the generations." [5]

13. praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted: "In his name Yahweh has proclaimed himself as Creator and King of the universe. The NT church confesses that the name to which all of creation is related is Jesus Christ (cf. Col. 1:15ff.; Heb. 1:3f.)." [6]

14. He has raised up a horn for his people: "...the raising up of a 'horn' is mentioned in v. 14. [*qrn*] is in the OT a symbol for 'strength' (cf. Pss. 75:5, 10; 89:17, 24). There is hardly an answer to the question as to what, specifically, is being referred to." [7] This verse is the basis for Luke 1:69, "and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David his servant."

Galatians 4:4-7

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

4. when the fullness of time had come: This is "the date set by the Father," when the heirs will inherit. All the necessary preliminaries had been fulfilled. "Gl.4:4 is not just saying that a divinely determined span of time has run its course or that a divinely ordained point has been reached.... With the sending of the Son time (cf. Eph. 1:10) is fulfilled absolutely; it attains to its full measure in content as well as extent.... God's saving work has come directly into history; in the historical event of the earthly Jesus...God accomplishes His eschatological act. [8]

"born of a woman: Paul's writings give no indication that he either knew or accepted the tradition of the Virgin Birth. This phrase simply points out that Jesus was a real human being born of a human mother.

born under the law: Luke makes it clear in his account of Jesus' birth and early life that he was indeed born and raised "under the law." See also Luke's repeated reference to the time of Jesus' coming, "in those days," and so on (Luke 1:5, 24, 39; 2:1). Jesus' circumcision is mentioned in Luke 2:21 (omitted from the Gospel for the day) points to his life under the Torah. The relationship of Christians to the law, and especially to circumcision is a major topic in Galatians. Here is viewed as something positive, or at least neutral. [9] In Galatians 3:1-14 it is seen as negative particularly for non-Israelites.

5. to redeem those who were under the law: The statement about the circumstances of Jesus' birth now takes on a soteriological purpose. That purpose is limited to those "under the law," that is, to Israelites.

so that we might receive adoption as children: Here Paul identifies himself with the Galatian

Gentiles. In Galatians 3:13 Paul describes Jesus as "becoming a curse for us," Gentiles, to redeem us from the curse of the law, and put us under the blessing of Abraham, so there is no difference between Jew and Greek any more. Gentiles have also become a part of God's chosen people. "In Galatians "receiving sonship" occurs in the ritual of baptism" [10] (Galatians 3:26f). The Galatians are "children of God," even though they are not a part of the Covenant of Sinai.

6. *God has sent the Spirit of his Son...crying "Abba! Father!":* The Spirit calls God "Father." The gift of the Spirit is not dependent on adoption through baptism, but rather an acknowledgement of the Galatians' experience of the Spirit in their lives.

"Abba! Father!": "The doubling of the invocation 'Father' seems to reflect the bilingual character of the early church.... the inspired acclamation 'Abba! Father!' shows both the inspiration of those who pray and their self-understanding as sons by those who address him 'Father.'" [11]

7. *you are no longer a slave but a child...an heir, through God.:* The identity of the believer depends completely on God and what he has done in the fullness of time in Jesus.

Luke 2:22-40

{22} When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him 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"), {24} and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." {25} Now 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. {26} It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. {27} Guided 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, {28} Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, {29} "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; {30} for my eyes have seen your salvation, {31} which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, {32} a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." {33} And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. {34} Then 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 {35} so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too." {36} There 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, {37} then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. {38} At 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. {39} When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. {40} The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

The Gospel for the First Sunday after Christmas is the first official appearance of Jesus in public. The Gospel is also used for the Presentation of Our Lord on February 2 in all three years.

[[21. *After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb:* Leviticus 12:3. John like Jesus is given his name at his *bris*. There is no requirement in the Torah requiring the name be given at the circumcision. This verse should be included with the pericope which follows. It makes clear that Jesus was firmly based in the traditions of Israel.]]

22. *When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses:* Leviticus 12:2-8, provides for a ceremony of purification for a woman who had given birth to a male child forty days after the birth. Mary's need for purification has nothing to do with uncleanness associated with sexual intercourse or its consequences, but rather with the idea that conception and birth are unexplainable (at least in the first century) and border on the supernatural, therefore out of place in earthly affairs. [12] A woman who has given birth must be "purified" and formally re-integrated into the community.

they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord: Jerusalem was where Yahweh could be approached in his Temple, and it is there that he will be presented to Yahweh. The story is similar to the presentation of Samuel at the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

23. *as it is written in the law of the Lord*: The formula, "as it is written," is found in the LXX of 2 Kings 14:6 where it introduces a reference to the Law of Moses. I think this is the earliest quotation of Torah as authoritative. "the law of the Lord" refers to the Torah, or the Law of Moses.

"Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord": This is a paraphrase of Exodus 13:2, "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine." All firstborn animals had to be redeemed or sacrificed. Firstborn sons had to be redeemed (Exodus 13:11-15). The price of redemption was five shekels of silver (Numbers 18:15-16).

24. *they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."*: Leviticus 12:6-8. This offering is for Mary's purification and properly would be made at the end of 40 days. The offering was a reduced offering for poor people. The festival of The Presentation of our Lord (The Purification of Mary) on February 2 is dated to observe this event.

25. *Simeon*: This man is otherwise unknown, although legends identify him as a high priest, and a Christian, the Simeon of Acts 15:14. [13]

looking forward to the consolation of Israel: "...an allusion to the Book of Consolation in Deutero-Isaiah. Both the consolation of Israel and the redemption/deliverance of Jerusalem (v. 38) are the message of the herald of good news Isa 52:9." [14]

27. *what was customary under the law*: This must refer to the redemption of the first-born, but nothing is said about such a payment being made for Jesus. He remains "holy to the Lord," the unredeemed redeemer, ultimately sacrificed.

29-32: Simeon acknowledges that the revelation that he had received (Luke 2:26) is now fulfilled. His words are descriptive of Jesus' future actions.

31. *in the presence of all peoples*: Isaiah 52:10. Both Israelites and Gentiles, as specified in verse 32.

32. *light...glory*: The two words are used together in Isaiah 60:1. Together here they speak of the revelation of God's grace to both Gentiles and Israelites.

34-35: Simeon's blessing is as in verses 29-32 a description of Jesus' future. He would be an ambiguous figure affecting the success and failure of many, one who would be the object of disapproval. Mary would be affected, too. "In the Gospel proper Jesus will be depicted as one who brings dissension even within families (12:51-53). Thus, with the imagery of the sword piercing Mary, Simeon hints at the difficulty she will have in learning that obedience to the word of God will transcend even family ties. Recall how Mary will be depicted in Luke 8:21 and 11: 27-28." [15]

36. *Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher*: Anna is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:2). Hannah is one of the seven prophetesses named in Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 14a.

36-37. *She was of a great age*: Zechariah and Elizabeth, John's parents are described by the same words in Luke 1:7.

38. *she...began...to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem*: In Luke 24:21: Clopas and his companion tell Jesus, "we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." The irony is that Anna had already recognized that he was exactly that one.

39. *everything required by the law of the Lord*: Luke makes sure we know that Jesus was properly established within the traditions of Israel, a proper Israelite.

they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth: Luke 1:26; 2:4. Though the family had come to Jerusalem from Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-21), when they leave they return to Galilee.

40: John is described in exactly the same words in Luke 1:80. Jesus' circumcision and name giving (2:21) are also describe in the same way as John's. These point to the parallelism of the John-Jesus stories in Luke's gospel. [16]

Reflection

The first lesson speaks of the restoration of Jerusalem following the exile. In the context of

Christmas I that restoration is seen as coming to its fulfillment in the birth of Jesus. The Psalm responds to the announcement of the restoration with a call for universal praise. The Gospel recounts (with the addition of verse 21) the establishment of Jesus within the framework of human society, circumcision, name, blessing. Reed points out the "Epistle links the Gospel for the day with the Gospel of the Nativity." [17] It tells us what it all means. Jesus is placed firmly within the Torah tradition. Born "under the law" he, the unredeemed, redeemed those under the law. He also made those who were not born under the law children of God, and heirs of his blessings.

Hymns [18]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

730s E--Once In Royal (643v)

85 D--When Christ's

96 I--Your Heart, O

175 P--Ye Watchers and

727s II--The King of

639v G--Oh, Sleep Now

417, 52, 53, 61, 43

Prayers of the People [19]

P or A: In the season of the Nativity of Christ, we come before the throne of grace giving thanks and praying for the needs of others as well as ourselves saying, "Lord, in your mercy," and responding, "Hear our prayer."

A: O Christ, Son of God and human brother, you came to earth to save humankind. Make us witnesses of your goodness. Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

A: O Christ, King of glory, you accepted a humble birth in poverty to show us the spirit being a disciple. Grant that spirit to all who govern that all may joyfully accept the true ruler of all. Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

A: O Christ, you became a tiny child, laid in a manger to show us the simplicity and accessibility of the love of God. Help us to extend that love to those in need; the sick, the sorrowing and the lonely _____. Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

A: O Christ, living Bread, you were born in Bethlehem, the House of Bread, and long to feed and nurture us at your Table. Open our hearts to the blessings of your sacrament and broaden our sense of communion with you and all believers at that Table. Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

A: O Christ, Shepherd of all, you and your parents became refugees in a strange land. Care for those who are forced from their homes by violence. Make us receptive to these who sojourn among us and teach us together more of your loving salvation. Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

P: Eternal Father, hear our prayers and take away all sadness and doubt. May the mystery of your birth and the glory of your cross, comfort and encourage us in every way. Amen.

Or [20]

Presider or deacon

As we join the whole creation and celebrate with joy the Word made flesh, let us offer prayers to God who dwells among us to the end of time.

Deacon or other leader

By the wedding of the human and divine natures in Christ Jesus.

For N our bishop and the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For all believers who put their trust in the incarnate Son of God. For the leaders of the nations and all in authority, and for peace and justice.

For the conversion of the whole human race to our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, for those in prison, and for the dying and the dead.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Remembering our most glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, N, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Source of grace and truth, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast. May we come to see the true light who shines throughout the world and who is God for all eternity. Glory to you for ever.

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Notes

[1] John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1968, p. LXVII.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

[3] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 512.

[4] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 563.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 563-564.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 564.

[7] Loc. cit.

[8] Gerhard Delling, “[pleroma],” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. by Gerhard Friedrich). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Vol. VI, 1968, p. 305.

[9] Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979, p. 207. Betz says that the phrase “under the law” “must have originally had a positive meaning, in contrast to the Pauline context, where it is viewed negatively.”

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 209.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 211.

[12] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, pp. 318-319.

[13] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke (1-IX). Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1981, p. 426.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 421.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 430.

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 313-315.

[17] Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947, p. 477.

[18] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0102.txt>

[19] http://www.worship.ca/text/int_a2.txt

[20] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>