

Sunday, December 30, 2007
First Sunday of Christmas

INTRODUCTION

As we celebrate the Twelve Days of Christmas, our gospel today confronts us with the death of innocent children at the hands of Herod. The birth of Christ does not remove the power of evil from our world, but its light gives us hope as we walk with all the "holy innocents" of past generations and today who have suffered unjustly. In our gathering around word and meal, God continues to redeem us, lift us up, and carry us as in days of old.

PRAYER OF THE DAY (ELW)

O Lord God,
you know that we cannot place our trust in our own powers.
As you protected the infant Jesus,
so defend us and all the needy from harm and adversity,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

READINGS

Isaiah 63:7–9
Psalm 148
Hebrews 2:10–18
Matthew 2:13–23

FIRST READING: Isaiah 63:7–9

God does not delegate divine intervention to a messenger or angel. God's own presence brings salvation. The prophet and all who read these words join in celebrating God's gracious deeds. God trusts that God's people will not act falsely.

⁷I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD,
the praiseworthy acts of the LORD,
because of all that the LORD has done for us,
and the great favor to the house of Israel
that he has shown them according to his mercy,
according to the abundance of his steadfast love.
⁸For he said, "Surely they are my people,
children who will not deal falsely";
and he became their savior
⁹in all their distress.
It was no messenger or angel
but his presence that saved them;
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.\

PSALM (ELW): Psalm 148

¹Hallelujah! Praise the LORD ¹from the heavens;
praise God ¹in the heights.
²Praise the LORD, ¹all you angels;
sing praise, all you ¹hosts of heaven.
³Praise the LORD, ¹sun and moon;
sing praise, all you ¹shining stars.
⁴Praise the LORD, heav- ¹en of heavens,
and you waters a- ¹bove the heavens.
⁵Let them praise the name ¹of the LORD,
who commanded, and they ¹were created,

**⁶who made them stand fast forever and ever,
giving them a law which 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: Hebrews 2:10–18

Through Jesus' suffering and death, the trail to eternal salvation has been blazed for us. We do not fear death, because he has conquered the power of death. Thus Christ, our merciful and faithful high priest, has the final say over the destiny of our lives.

¹⁰It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹²saying,

"I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters,
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

¹³And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again,

"Here am I and the children whom God has given me."

¹⁴Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. ¹⁶For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

GOSPEL: Matthew 2:13–23

Matthew relates the slaughter of babies in Bethlehem as one example of evil in the world. Jesus has been born into this world to manifest God's presence and save his people from their sins.

¹³Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸"A voice was heard in Ramah,

wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."
¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead. ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean."

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Rejoicing in the Word made flesh, let us pray for the Church, this congregation, and all of God's creation.

A brief silence.

For the church, that in celebrating the feast of Christ's birth, we may receive the fullness of your new life and be sanctified to proclaim your steadfast love. Lord God, Immanuel,
come into our hearts.

For leaders throughout the world, that as the new year dawns, they might refrain from violence and work on behalf of the poor and oppressed in every land. Lord God, Immanuel,
come into our hearts.

For refugees and victims of persecution, that they might receive needed aid and places of sanctuary, and that we might support them with the gifts you have first given us. Lord God, Immanuel,
come into our hearts.

For this community of faith, that following the example of Joseph, we may be attentive to your holy dreams and visions, and act in obedience to your loving will. Lord God, Immanuel,
come into our hearts.

For the poor, the grieving, and the sick in mind, body, and spirit (*especially*), that they might know your presence in the midst of their suffering, and be strengthened by the Word made flesh. Lord God, Immanuel,
come into our hearts.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

For those who have died in your steadfast love and mercy (*especially*), that with them we may receive the saving promise of Christ's birth and live with you forever. Lord God, Immanuel,
come into our hearts.

Trusting in your mercy, O saving God, we commend to you all for whom we pray, through the one born among us, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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