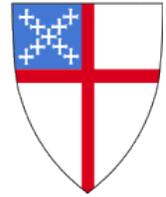


The Lessons Appointed for Use on
the Feast of

Christmas Day

December 25
Selection I, RCL
All Years



Isaiah 9:2-7
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-14(15-20)
Psalm 96

The Collect

O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness--
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

The Psalm

Psalm 96

Cantate Domino

- 1 Sing to the LORD a new song; *
sing to the LORD, all the whole earth.
- 2 Sing to the LORD and bless his Name; *
proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations *
and his wonders among all peoples.
- 4 For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; *
he is more to be feared than all gods.
- 5 As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; *
but it is the LORD who made the heavens.
- 6 Oh, the majesty and magnificence of his presence! *
Oh, the power and the splendor of his sanctuary!
- 7 Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples; *
ascribe to the LORD honor and power.
- 8 Ascribe to the LORD the honor due his Name; *
bring offerings and come into his courts.
- 9 Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness; *
let the whole earth tremble before him.
- 10 Tell it out among the nations: "The LORD is King! *
he has made the world so firm that it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity."
- 11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it; *
let the field be joyful and all that is therein.
- 12 Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy
before the LORD when he comes, *
when he comes to judge the earth.

13 He will judge the world with righteousness *
and the peoples with his truth.

The New Testament

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

The Gospel

Luke 2:1-14(15-20)

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

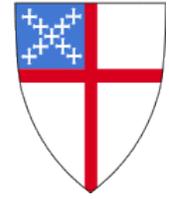
[When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.]

The Lessons Appointed for Use on

the Feast of Christmas Day

December 25 Selection I, RCL

All Years



Isaiah 9:2-7 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14(15-20) Psalm 96

Merry Christmas! Happy Birthday, baby Jesus!

Several of us started our Christmas observation a few nights ago watching the light of the winter solstice transform our little church. The Vesper light, or light from the setting sun, changed the way our lovely, storied stained glass windows told their individual stories of the life of Jesus, his family, and disciples. As the light moved through the cycle of the evening from late afternoon into even darkness, those of us who gathered reveled in the beauty.

We then watched “the Nativity Story”, a movie that depicted an unromanzed story of the hardships of first century Palestine. Watching the story unfold in the conditions of poverty, absolute authority of the government, and living at the mercy of the weather was enlightening. Some of us find it difficult to walk from our car to the store, and Joseph and Mary traveled on foot, maybe with a donkey, over 90 miles from family to the distant town of Bethlehem without the

chance to phone ahead to find family or friends to host their stay. And Mary was very pregnant. They had to hope for a vacancy in an inn. They were probably taken in by a family who offered them a space in a lower room, and brought in a manger in for the baby's crib.

Despite Abraham, Moses, and David among so many others in the Old Testament that were shepherds, by first century Palestine, shepherds were among the lowest of the low. They were right in there with tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners. And they were among the first to hear of the birth of the Messiah. And they went looking for him, and found him just as the angels had told them. But not just these poor, the wise and powerful sought him, and once finding him acknowledged his kingship. It tells us that there is good news for the entire strata of human society.

How would those shepherds have felt, the maligned of society, suddenly in the presence of an angel announcing to them the birth of the long-awaited Messiah. Then their normally quiet skies filled not must with stars, but with choirs of angels singing about the glories of the king, born to all, in the little town of Bethlehem. His birth perhaps not unlike their own.

They were directed to find the baby, swaddled in bands of cloth, showing the love and concern for His welfare demonstrated by his earthly parents. Yet, he slept in a manger. Not unlike a cradle, the soft straw provided just the right amount of cushion, warmth, and protection for the new born. And it was a sign to those who sought Him. The angels told the shepherds, you will find him wrapped in bands of cloth, lying in a manger.

The contrasts, carefully swaddled, but sleeping in a manger; sought by shepherds from the neighboring fields, and wise men from afar. Worshiped and cherished, and at the same time the target of a ruthless, jealous, and fearful king. He was sent among us to offer salvation, redemption, and reconciliation with God, our father in heaven. He brought a new rule, "love one another." Some of us get that, and some never will.

We have waited an entire year for this night. We decide whose turn it is to host the Christmas dinner. Will we go here for Thanksgiving, and there for Christmas. We begin our preparations for next Christmas as soon as the last hymn or carol is sung, the last decoration stored away, the last bit of the feast is consumed. As our beloved relatives and friends leave our homes, we wish them back again next

year. This allows us to try, year after year, to perfect our relationships with one another.

As we finish our festivities this year, it is my hope that we consider plans for next year. Plans to love, support, help our neighbors. Plans to carry the message that God loves us, and that the spirit of God is alive and well in our time. Let us live to be all that God would have us be, the body of Christ.

When the song of the angels is stilled.

When the star in the sky is gone.

When the kings and the princes are home.

When the shepherds are back with their flock, the work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,

To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry,

To release the prisoner,

To rebuild nations,

To bring peace among brothers,

To make music in the heart.

- Howard Thurman (1899-1991), The Work of Christmas.