

Sunday, January 3, 2021

Second Sunday of Christmas, Year B

Introduction

Within the gospel reading's profound words lies the simple message that God is revealed in a human person. Though we may try to understand how the Word existed with God from the beginning of time, the wonder we celebrate at Christmas is that the Word continues to dwell among us. Christ comes among us in the gathered assembly, the scriptures, the waters of new birth, and the bread and the wine. Through these ordinary gifts we receive the fullness of God's grace and truth.

Prayer of the Day

P Almighty God, you have filled all the earth with the light of your incarnate Word. By your grace empower us to reflect your light in all that we do, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

Jeremiah 31:7-14

God promises to bring Israel back to its land from the most remote parts of exile. In Zion Israel will rejoice over God's gifts of food and livestock. Young women will express their joy in dancing; God will give gladness instead of sorrow.

⁷Thus says the LORD:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
"Save, O LORD, your people,
the remnant of Israel."

⁸See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labor, together;
a great company, they shall return here.

⁹With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;

say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."

¹¹For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

¹²They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

¹³Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.

I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

¹⁴I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,
says the LORD.

John 1:1-18

John begins his gospel with this prologue: a hymn to the Word through whom all things were created. This Word became flesh and brought grace and truth to the world.

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Sermon

The first records of the **word ordinary** come from the 1200s. It comes from the Latin *ordinārius*, **meaning** “regular” or “of the usual order.” **Ordinary** things are regular—they exist in the usual order of things. The adverb form *ordinarily* means “usually” or “in an **ordinary** manner.”

The Power of the Ordinary

Some aspects of our spiritual lives benefit from simple routine

Please let me preach today in reference to last Sunday’s Gospel lesson from Luke, which described Jesus’ being presented at the Temple in Jerusalem, eight days after his birth.

While we often look for extraordinary signs to prove or confirm God’s existence and activity in the world,
Christmas is about God’s work in the opposite direction.

God uses ordinary things to assure us that we are not alone.

Whether in Luke, Matthew or John
God comes to be with us in human form – flesh and blood –
so that our ordinariness may be redeemed.

The story of Jesus being taken to the Temple
just eight days after his birth illustrates my point.

As the first-born son of Mary and Joseph
and God
the ancient Law required him to be dedicated to the Lord.

Remember Hannah,
and her desperate prayer to God,
during the days of Eli’s priesthood.

She wanted a son
for her husband Elkanah.

And when she “who was thought to be barren”
Conceived and bore a son,
she gave him up after a few years,
so that he might not only be dedicated to God,
but raised there as well.

Which is one dimension of the story of Abraham
nearly sacrificing the child born to him and Sarah.

In a sense Mary and Joseph knew that Jesus was not their child
in the sense of owning or possessing him.

He was God's son.

Which meant there was something special or unique about him.

But not so strange that the ordinary custom was ignored.

It is not provided in the text,
but it is likely that standardised prayers and blessings were offered.

The same ones used whenever a first-born son was presented;
perhaps recited by the attending priest by heart.

Like some parts of the Sunday morning liturgy,
including most forms of the Kyrie,
Glory to God,
and the Lord's Prayer.

The fact that they are routine
is no reason to believe they are unimportant.

So too with the act of circumcision.

It was submission to a ritual stretching back to Abraham.

As God made covenant with him and his descendants
the patriarch was asked to receive a sign in the flesh.

And while it may have had something to do with health
and distinction from other tribes and nations
it also bore witness to Abraham's trust in God.

Which is another dimension of the near death of Isaac.

On the eighth day Jesus was marked in the same way
as every Jewish boy.

Which leads us to wonder what Simeon and Anna saw.

Somehow,
in the ordinariness of it all,
God revealed to them that particular boy was different;
the fulfillment of a lifetime of waiting.

Perhaps even because of the plainness of it all.

No warrior king descended from the sky,
announced by fanfare
in the world's great hall's of power,
but an ordinary child
born to ordinary parents
in an ordinary place
at an ordinary time.

Jesus, not a mighty God apart and above,
But one of us,
well-acquainted with struggle, poverty and oppression.

One as easily overlooked as the Suffering Servant
described to us by the prophet Isaiah.

God slipping in among us, unnoticed,
loving us whether we seek for or appreciate it.

As Luke sees it
these ordinary circumstances of Jesus' life,
and the routines he and his parents observe
are the very things we might expect from a God
who wants to be connected or ordinary people like you and me.

Which is to say that Christmas
invites us to encounter God in the plainness of our lives;
to revel in the things we have in common,
and to know that our flesh and blood has been made holy
by the God who finds a way to be with us almost unnoticed.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

P Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

A Reconciling God, you bring together heaven and earth. All creation testifies to your splendour. Hold the ecosystems of this earth in delicate balance, from coastlands to farmlands, forests to wetlands, deserts to rainforests. Show us new ways to live in harmony with the world around us. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

A You gather together your people from the farthest parts of the earth. Protect your church from stumbling. Let it not be overcome by sorrow, division, or despair. Make us radiant with goodness, that we might live always to the praise of your glory. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

A You overflow with grace upon grace. Expand the imaginations of those who serve in positions of authority. Open their hearts to the needs of their nations and communities. Protect all those in harm's way and those risking danger for the sake of others. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

A You bring consolation to those who weep. Embrace those who feel far-off, excluded, or defeated. Accompany those living with chronic and invisible illness. Sustain the weak and weary. Refresh those who labour under the weight of pain or sickness (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

A You come to us in the beauty of darkness and of light. Bring justice and reconciliation to communities divided by oppressions and misuse of power. Guide us to speak holy words of advocacy and truth. Help us to honour your image in one another. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

A You turn our mourning into joy. We give thanks for those who have died in faith (*especially Gisela*). With all the saints, give us our inheritance in Christ. In the fullness of time, gather us all together in your mercy. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

P God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus.

C Amen.

Offering Prayer

A Gracious God,
you came to us as one unknown,
bringing joy and salvation to the earth.
Nourish us,
that with all who welcome your birth
we may proclaim your peace,
revealed in Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

C **Amen.**

Blessing

P Almighty God,
who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary,
proclaimed joy through the angels,
sent the shepherds with good news,
and led the magi by a star,
bless you this day ✝ through the Word made flesh.

C **Amen.**

Dismissal

A Go in peace. Share the gift of Jesus.
Thanks be to God.

Upcoming Commemorations

**Adrian of Canterbury, teacher, died around 710 (TFF)
Saturday, January 9, 2021**

African by birth, Adrian (or Hadrian) worked with Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury, in developing the church in England. He was director of a school at which church leaders were trained.