

Readings and Sermon Christmas Day 2025

Isaiah 62.6-12

⁶ Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest, ⁷ and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned throughout the earth. ⁸ The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink the wine for which you have laboured; ⁹ but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather it shall drink it in my holy courts. ¹⁰ Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples. ¹¹ The Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, 'See, your salvation comes; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.' ¹² They shall be called, 'The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord'; and you shall be called, 'Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.'

Psalms 97

¹ The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice:
let the multitude of islands be glad.
² Clouds and darkness are round about him:
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
³ Fire goes before him:
and burns up his enemies on every side.
⁴ His lightnings light the world:
the earth sees it and quakes.
⁵ The mountains melt like wax before his face:
from before the face of the Lord of all the earth.
⁶ The heavens have proclaimed his righteousness:
and all peoples have seen his glory.
⁷ They are ashamed, all those who serve idols and glory in mere nothings:
all gods bow down before him.
⁸ Zion heard and was glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoiced:
because of your judgements, O God.
⁹ For you, Lord, are most high over all the earth:
you are exalted far above all gods.

¹⁰ The Lord loves those that hate evil:
the Lord guards the life of the faithful,
and delivers them from the hand of the ungodly.

¹¹ Light dawns for the righteous:
and joy for the true of heart.

¹² Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous:
and give thanks to his holy name.

Titus 3.4-8a

⁴ But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶ This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸ The saying is sure. I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone.

Luke 2.8-20

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!' ¹⁵ 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.' ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Sermon

Today's reading from Titus begins, of course, with a "but". It's what Paul writes after it flows from what he's just written. *The Message Bible* poetically paraphrases what Paul writes in verse 3, "It wasn't so long ago that we ourselves were stupid and stubborn, fools in our sin, ordered every which way by our glands, going around with a chip on our shoulder, hated and hating back." But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Not because of anything we'd done. God knew we couldn't help ourselves, that we were incapable of changing. So, God, in his great mercy, has sent Jesus to save us by the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Why, then, did the Holy Spirit come upon Mary and the power of the Most High overshadow her (Luke 1:35)? To respond with God's kindness and love (4) to the human cruelty and hatred that characterized not just Jesus' contemporaries and Titus' readers, but also all of humanity. The Jesus whose birth Christians celebrate on Christmas Day is God's great "but" to humankind's great sin.

At Bethlehem's manger, God meets humanity's revolt with "kindness" and "love". Why, then, did Mary "give birth to her firstborn, a son"? So that her oldest son might live out the name his parents gave him when they named him "Jesus." Mary endured the pain of childbirth and all that followed it so that her firstborn, God our Saviour, might be a Saviour to us.

In fact, Paul adds, Jesus' birth awaits our own "rebirth and renewal". The One who was born to save God's deeply beloved people from their sins was born so that in the economy of God's grace, we might be reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was born in what was likely some kind of grimy shed so that the Spirit, in *The Message's* paraphrase, might give us a "good bath" so that we might be "washed inside and out."

When the angels sing of peace on earth and goodwill to all on whom God's favour rests, the only peace the Middle Eastern corner of the world knows is that which the Romans carry out at the point of a sword. So why could the angels sing of a different and more lasting peace in Luke 2:14? Because when

Jesus was born to save us, it wasn't because of the peace that people generated and developed. Jesus was born in Bethlehem because of God's "mercy".

In fact, had God chosen to rescue God's people because we were such nice people who longed for God to save us, there would have been no reason for the angels to sing and the shepherds to rejoice. Humanity would have, instead, gladly stayed on its one-way road to eternal separation from God and God's purposes. Jesus' birth is a means by which God compassionately opens another road for us.

When the shepherds find the baby Jesus just as the angels had promised, they respond by spreading the word concerning what those angels had told them about the child. Yet had God not generously poured the Spirit out on God's beloved people, no one would have believed that word. We would have remained in the spiritual darkness of assuming that Jesus, if he existed at all, was nothing more than a nice guy who offered some good advice.

When we celebrate the Nativity, we remember what the birth of Jesus meant for the world and now means for us individually and collectively. Out of this should come our witness." When the shepherds tell everyone, they meet what the angels had said about the Christ-child, they testify, thus we need to do the same.

The shepherds return to work on Christmas night "glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen". God's people join them on this Christmas Day because God has graced us with perhaps even more than God graced those shepherds. God has, after all, justified God's adopted sons and daughters by God's grace so that we're now the receivers of "the hope of eternal life".

Titus, in fact, lifts our eyes this Christmas Day's way beyond Bethlehem and Jesus' first coming. the Spirit uses this message from Paul to point us beyond the manger to things like the gift of the Holy Spirit, our adoption into God's family as heirs, and the hope of eternal life lived in God's glorious presence. It's a hope that as God's adopted sons and daughters we carry this message back to our homes, not just on Christmas Day, but also on every day with which God graces us. It's a message we need more than ever especially in wake of the evil that occurred a week and half ago. I say it once more as God's adopted sons and daughters by God's grace so we're now the receivers of "the hope of eternal life". Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ born this happy morning. Amen.