

**THE COMING LORD: THE CELEBRATION OF HIS COMING**

**Advent B4 – Isa 9:2-7; Ps 96; Titus 2:11-14;**

**Luke 2:1-14; Heb 1:1-4; John 1:1-14**

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\*Responsive Reading of Ps 96:1-4 and Invocation.

[Psalm 96 is a hymn that calls the people to proclaim the greatness of God in song and praise. Its special appropriateness to the Christmas Season lies in its universal call for all the earth to sing a new song and to worship God.]

*Worthy Art Thou* (vv. 1&3)

*O Come, Let Us Adore Him*

Part 1: Jesus Christ Has Come

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>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 (Isa 9:2-7, NRSV).

The primary problem of this passage is the violins. Yes, the violins. After all, who can read it without hearing the violins in Handel's *Messiah* striking up the introduction to "For unto us a child is born . . ." ? Perhaps the best commentary on Isaiah 9 is found in this oratorio of Handel's *Messiah*. He captured the drama of the text with the shift from the dark, minor mode of v. 2—"The people that walked in darkness" (Air for Bass, #11)—to the major key of v. 6—"For unto us a child is born" (Chorus, #12).

The prophet pronounces three reasons for future joy in vv. 4-6,<sup>1</sup> and the clear climax is the birth of a son. This child will grow up to be a great king, a king from the line of David. Such promises of the coming Davidic ruler take up the themes expressed in the Royal Psalms from the days of King David. After the monarchy, when there were no more kings, these promises projected into the future a portrait of an ideal king to come. This coming king would be the "anointed one"—the Messiah.

<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>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.

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

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<sup>1</sup>Note that vv. 4, 5, and 6 (vv. 3, 4, and 5 in Hebrew) each begin with "for" (כִּי – *ki*).

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” (Luke 2:1-14, NRSV).

The emperor Octavian was a prominent figure who solidified the somewhat divided loyalties of the various regions of the empire and ushered in the famous Roman Peace (*Pax Romana*). In 27 B.C., the Roman senate gave him the title “the August One.” Poets wrote of his peaceful ideas and anticipated that his reign would signal a golden age based on virtue. Ancient monuments even ascribed to him the title “savior.” He represented a high and hopeful moment in Roman history. However, Octavian–Caesar Augustus–was to be succeeded by rulers who turned the imperial dreams into nightmares.

Announced against the background and within the boundaries of Caesar’s world is the birth of another ruler, from the lineage of David, whose meager and mild beginnings–on the surface–do not compare with the power and promise of Augustus. All the world obeys the Caesar, but Jesus’ parents are rejected and relegated to a cattle stall. The gospel-writer Luke does not present a confrontation between Augustus and Jesus, but provides a contrast: a contrast between false hopes and true hopes, between human potential and divine promise, between the imposing but short-lived dominion of Caesar’s rule and the humble manifestation of the eternal dominion of God, between the peace of Rome and the peace of Christ. Jesus–not Augustus–is Savior, Messiah, and Lord!

*Joy to the World*

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* (v. 1)

*Angels We Have Heard on High* (v. 1)

*Silent Night! Holy Night!* (vv. 1,2&3)

\*The Offering.

## Part 2: Jesus Christ Is Here

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

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

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

<sup>14</sup>And 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 (John 1:1-14, NRSV).

The babe born in Bethlehem is God enfleshed—God in the flesh. He is God as one of us, among all of us. The Word came to a world that should have known Him; after all, He had created the world. The Word is “full of grace and truth,” which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew phrase “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”<sup>2</sup> To those, then and now, who choose to accept Jesus Christ, they become children of God.

<sup>1</sup>Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. <sup>3</sup>He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs (Heb 1:1-4, NRSV).

“These last days”—those are the days in which you and I live. The God who has never been silent (and such is the supposition of the Hebrews text), speaks now through His Son. We celebrate Christmas every year because we must remember and rejoice every year that the Messiah born long ago is the Messiah who reigns and who redeems *now*! The Christ who came is the Christ who is still here!

*The Joy of the Lord (vv. 1&3)*

*Your Are the Song That I Sing*

*Jesus, Let Us Come to Know You*

### Part 3: Jesus Christ Is Coming

<sup>11</sup>For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, <sup>12</sup>training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, <sup>13</sup>while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. <sup>14</sup>He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for

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<sup>2</sup>Exod 34:6.

himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:11-14, NRSV).

Put on your bifocals, because you will need them. This scripture sees the coming of Christ with a bifocal view: He has come and He is coming. The past arrival of God's grace and the blessed hope of the future arrival of God's glory are both anchored in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. "The grace of God has *appeared*": the verb "appeared" comes from the Greek ἐπεφάνη (*epephanē*)<sup>3</sup>—"epiphany." "The *manifestation* (*appearing*) of the glory": the noun "manifestation" comes from the Greek ἐπιφάνειαν (*epiphaneian*)<sup>4</sup>—"epiphany." We live our lives "between the times": between the Advents or Comings, between the Epiphanies or Appearings. We live between the epiphany of God's grace and the epiphany of God's glory. During the Christmas Season, we express our celebration for the first epiphany and we express our confidence for the second epiphany.

The Titus text stresses what ought to be our moral response to God's magnificent revelations. "In the present age," we are to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly." "Self-controlled" refers to being sensible and showing moderation, and relates to the way we deal with our own selves. "Upright" refers to behaving justly or rightly, and relates to the way we deal with others. "Godly" refers to being devout or reverent, and relates to the way we deal with God.

Jesus Christ has come; Jesus Christ is here; and, Jesus Christ is coming. With a bifocal perspective, we look to the past and we look to the future and we perceive how to live in the present. Christmas, it teaches us how to live *every day of every year!*

*The New Song* (vv. 1&3)

*I Am Mine No More*

\*The Lord's Supper.

*In Moments Like These*

\*Reading of Ps 96 and Benediction.

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<sup>3</sup>Verb: indicative, aorist, passive, 3rd-person, singular, from ἐπιφαίνω.

<sup>4</sup>Noun: accusative, feminine, singular, from ἐπιφάνεια.

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