

Second Sunday after Christmas
January 2, 2022

*Even if we cannot gather in person
Emmanuel God is with us
Even if some Christmas traditions have had to go
Emmanuel God is with us
Even if we might not get to hug family and friends
Emmanuel God is with us
Even if we can not sing carols beside each other
Emmanuel God is with us
Even if Christmas Cheer is harder this year
Emmanuel God is with us*

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires are known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us now pray the collect of the day.

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

First Lesson
Jeremiah 31:7-14

Thus 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."

See, 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.

With 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.

Hear 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."

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

They 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.

Then 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.

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

says the Lord.

The Psalm
Psalm 84 or 84:1-8
Quam dilecta!

1 How dear to me is your dwelling, O Lord of hosts!
My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.

2 The sparrow has found her a house
and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young;
by the side of your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.

3 Happy are they who dwell in your house!
they will always be praising you.

4 Happy are the people whose strength is in you!
whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way.

5 Those who go through the desolate valley will find it a place of springs,
for the early rains have covered it with pools of water.

6 They will climb from height to height,
and the God of gods will reveal himself in Zion.

7 Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
hearken, O God of Jacob.

8 Behold our defender, O God;
and look upon the face of your Anointed.

[9 For one day in your courts is better than a thousand in my own room,
and to stand at the threshold of the house of my God
than to dwell in the tents of the wicked.

10 For the Lord God is both sun and shield;
he will give grace and glory;

11 No good thing will the Lord withhold
from those who walk with integrity.

12 O Lord of hosts,
happy are they who put their trust in you!]

The Epistle
Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19a

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe.

The Gospel

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Luke.
Glory to you Lord Christ.

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;

for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Praise to you Lord Christ.

A Reflection

The lectionary provides some interesting contemplations. On occasion, when preparing a service, I am provided with options for the readings, to allow the flexibility to perhaps accent a specific point in the lessons. Occasional choices in the Hebrew Bible, or choices between a Psalm or a Canticle, but this week provides the unusual opportunity to select a Gospel, with three separate choices being made available. Out of the given options, I chose the reading from Matthew you have now read. (If curious, the other options were Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 or Luke 2:41-52.) I chose the reading from Matthew as given, as this reading seems to flow right from the story we

have heard up to this point. The other readings are just as valid, of course, dealing with issues around the younger days of Jesus – but this reading from Matthew seemed to fit well with where we were. The story of the visit of the Magi maintains continuity with the rest of the story we have heard this year. (A story we will hear again and again, I'm sure.)

I like the story of the Magi, as they seem to be driven by faith. No GPS, no maps, they follow a star and follow it until it stops. We are offered, “When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.” To be driven by faith in this manner also requires a certain amount of trust. Yes, they are following a star – but no one seems to ask “But what if it leads us in a wrong direction? Their faith is stronger than these doubts. When the star stops, they are said to be “overwhelmed with joy” knowing their faith has led them on a true path before they have even seen the Messiah they have been seeking.

They offer their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and then, continuing to follow their faith “having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.” Their faith brought them to this place and then took them out on safe roads. Quite the gift, traveling by faith! My speculation is that they lived like what we heard in the Psalm, “O Lord of hosts, happy are they who put their trust in you.” They put their trust in the Lord, and, by way of a dream to not return to Herod, they remained safe, and “left for their own country by another road.”

For the other offered readings, I was also quite taken with these words in Isaiah. A story of beginnings, in many ways. Beginnings emerging from a time of weeping – perhaps not unlike where we are now.

See, 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.

With 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.

In our own personal story, it has been a hard road this past year. I also take comfort in God's promise of Letting us walk “in a straight path in which we shall not stumble.” And at the end of this path?

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

(I opted not to include the promise “I will give the priests their fill of fatness” – thank you, Lord, think I have that covered!)

All kidding aside, the point is the promise of good things to come, and I'm not sure we can ask for more at this time of a new beginning. Again, the last line of the Psalm offers "O Lord of hosts, happy are they who put their trust in you!" I strive to put my trust there as we begin again, just as the wise men did!

The story of the Magi always leaves me wondering a bit. Sometimes, I hear a story like this and wish I could hear the rest of the story – not the Jesus story – but the story of the Wise men. Wondering how this event and what they saw affected them. They left their gifts with the Messiah – what gifts did they receive?

Think about this for a moment. In your own life, in the process of Advent, what gifts did you bring to the manger on Christmas? They may not have been gold, frankincense, and myrrh – they may not have even been very "gift-worthy", in a way. I know I tried to leave my fear and concern at the side of the manger. My own fear about the virus situation, my mourning the passing of my mother or my concern for some of the folks I work with at the shelter or my concern about all of you in the parish. I tried to make a gift of my fear, as that puts a shadow on my heart – and our heart is, of course, the best gift we can give to the manger. At the manger, and always.

And what gift do we receive?

"They 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.

Then 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."

Sometimes, it can take some time to appreciate your gift for what it truly is.

Amen.

Let us end by praying as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us. Pray this as you will, out loud or to yourself – just know that God hears you.

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

We will continue with the prayer of Spiritual Communion. This prayer was written by St. Alphonsus de Liguori. This prayer is now often used when the church is in a place of fasting from Communion, and I have heard this used in many of the on-line services being offered. We will be using this prayer in place of Communion as we work on regathering, too.

Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

I know church this way is awkward – but know that this is all being done with the thoughts to keeping us all safe and well. I pray we will not have to do this for long. Please, if you haven't, do get vaccinated and wear your masks when you go out. Stay safe and know that you are not alone.

Life is short,
And we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us –

So be swift to love,
Make haste to be kind,
And go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Merry Christmas!

In Christ,
David +