

Christmas Day

Isaiah 52:7-10

This beautiful passage proclaims the redemption and restoration of Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon. The messenger runs along the mountain ridges announcing peace and proclaiming to Jerusalem that her God is king. Then the sentinels of the city echo the good news and see God restoring the city before their very eyes. The city itself is invited to join in the song of good news, proclaiming God's mercy and power to the ends of the earth.¹

7How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, These tidings refer to news of goodness and well-being, that is, genuine material and spiritual prosperity.⁶ **announcing peace,** In this reference, peace means safety in Israel after the hardships of exile.⁶ **bearing good news, announcing salvation,** Salvation is permanent renewal on all levels and along with the core of the message which follows: "Your God reigns," the messenger announces the highest degree of happiness imaginable!⁶ **and saying to Zion, "Your God is King!"** This seems to harken back to the first days of the kingship in Israel when Samuel, the prophet, warrior, and last of the Judges of Israel is asked by Israel to appoint a king, so that Israel would be ruled like other nations and not just by God. God consoles Samuel with the words, "It is not you they reject, they are rejecting me as their king." (1Sam 8:7) We now have word of one who will come (Jesus) who as God will be born of the line of David and he will REUNITE divinity and kingship in himself. God will again be our King after a thousand years of earthly kingship that began with Saul!⁵ **Hark! Your sentinels raise a cry, together they shout for joy,** Those whose job it was to give warning of any threat now call out for joy. It is the messianic "shout for joy," caught up from earlier prophecies.³ **for they see directly, before their eyes, the Lord restoring Zion.** What we have watched for in Advent is now seen in the flesh!⁵

9Break out together in song, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord comforts his people, he redeems Jerusalem.

10The Lord has bared his holy arm "Baring his holy arm" is a symbol of vigorous action as in the time of the exodus.⁶ **in the sight of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will behold the salvation of our God.** With great enthusiasm the poet hastily repeats many favorite themes: ruins or dry wastes (48:21), comfort (40:1), redeems (41:14), his arm (51:5,9), ends of the earth (49:6), and salvation (49:6).³

Hebrews 1:1-6

Brothers and sisters: This reading tells us that all the prophecies and hopes of the Hebrew scriptures have their fulfillment in Jesus the Christ. It also shows us that the relationship of the Father and the Son has existed for all eternity—well before the Son took flesh and came to live among us. The writer is concerned with teaching us about the divinity of Jesus and his exalted origin as the Son of God. The "babe in the manger" is a compelling image, but remembering that this babe is the firstborn Son of the Father makes it all the more compelling.²

1In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; The OT revelation was given in fragments and in a variety of ways.⁴ The revelation was true but incomplete.¹

2in these last days, This refers to the final age which started with the Christ-event.⁴ **he has spoken to us through the Son,** Christ is God's last word to the world and what he has revealed is complete and final.⁴ **whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe,** Christ existed before he appeared as man for through him God created the universe.⁴

3who is the refulgence of his glory, This means “the light that shines forth from his glory”⁹ or it is sometimes translated that Christ “reflects the glory of God.” It means that Christ and the Father share the same nature, which is what we profess in the Creed when we say that Jesus Christ is “light from light, true God from true God.” This and the two following images teach that Jesus Christ is perfect God, identical to the Father.⁸ **the very imprint of his being**,

Christ is the exact image, the full and exact expression of God⁹ **and who sustains all things by his mighty word**. This means that Christ guides and sustains all that has been created through him.⁴ If God did not maintain a continual, direct influence on his creation, the world would revert into non-being.⁸ **When he had accomplished purification from sins**, Attention is now turned from the Christ who existed before he became man to the redemptive work of the humiliated and glorified Jesus.⁴

he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, Sitting in the presence of God was a prerogative of the Davidic kings and the person at the right hand was seen as occupying the place of honor. Psalm 110 proclaims that God will have the Messiah sit at his right hand, and at various times Christ referred to this prophecy to assert that he was the Messiah and God.⁸

4as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. Christ is superior to the angels because he has the title of Son, which is his by natural right. The name shows that his nature is superior to that of any visible or invisible created being, whether material or spiritual, whether earthly or angelic.⁸

5For to which of the angels did God ever say: “You are my son; this day I have begotten you”? Or again: “I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me”? 6And again, when he leads the firstborn into the world, he says: “Let all the angels of God worship him.” To make Christ’s superiority clear, Hebrews then offers three quotations from the Old Testament: the first, from Psalm 2:7, is a song at the enthronement of the king, who is seen as God’s adopted son. The second, from 2 Samuel 7:14, refers to the establishment of David as king. The third is from the Greek version of Deuteronomy 32:43, the song of Moses. All three are used here to suggest that the Son surpasses the angels whom God never addresses as “Son.”¹

Christ is the center of the angelic world. They are his angels for they belong to him because they were created through and for him. They belong to him still more because he has made them messengers of his saving plan. They protected Jesus in his infancy, served him in the desert, strengthened him in his agony in the garden; they proclaimed the Good News of Christ’s Incarnation and Resurrection and they will be present at Christ’s return, which they will announce, to serve at his judgment. (CCC 331 & 333)⁷

John 1:1-18

This prologue is really a summary of the themes of John’s gospel: Jesus is the agent of the new creation, the life and light of the world, rejected by his own but accepted by those who believe in him.¹ John opens his gospel with the same words that open the book of Genesis, the book of creation.

1In the beginning was the Word, Translate this “Word” as “Son of God.”⁹ The passage then reads: “In the beginning was the Son of God, and the Son of God was with God and the Son of God was God. **and the Word was with God**, Here the Word is distinguished from the Father. They are not the same Person, yet they share the same nature in the family of the eternal Godhead. (CCC 254-56)⁷ **and the Word was God**. This is the first and clearest assertion of the deity of Jesus in John’s Gospel.(CCC 242)⁷ John traces the origin of the Word into eternity past, where God the Son was present with God the Father before time itself began.⁹ This makes a point similar to what we had in the reading from Hebrews. **2He was in the beginning with God**. For the fourth time John insists that the Word was with God at the beginning. Unlike created things, of which he is

about to speak, there never was a time when the Word was not.⁴

3All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. Creation, in distinction to the Word, came into being and the Word is the cause of this existence.⁴ **4What came to be through him was life,** Earthly life is a gift that is given and sustained by God through his eternal Word. Ultimately, natural and biological life points beyond itself to the supernatural and divine life that Jesus grants in abundance to the children of God.⁹ **and this life was the light** Because he is God, Jesus dwells in light and is Light itself. Light enables one to see. It is an element of moral goodness and is associated with purity, beauty, clarity, hope and truth.¹¹ “Light” is mentioned seven times in verses four through nine.⁵ **of the human race;**

5the light shines in the darkness Symbolic of the struggle between good and evil, Jesus himself is the true light.⁹ **and the darkness has not overcome it.** St. Augustine comments on this passage saying that the dull hearts of some cannot receive this light because their sins weigh them down and they cannot discern it. However, he says, just because they cannot discern it, does not mean that it is not present!¹⁰

6A man named John was sent from God. John the Baptist fulfilled a divine mission to Israel but was not the divine Messiah. Emphasis on John’s subordinate role to Jesus runs throughout this Gospel.

7He came for testimony to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. John the Baptist was actually able to point out the Messiah himself. His testimony marked the culmination of all the previous prophecies!¹⁰

8He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The writer carefully points out that the Baptist is a witness to the light.⁴

9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. The Baptist was A light but he was not THE light in the fullness of the meaning of light: only the Word gives this light to all men.⁴

10He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. Here he refers to the world of men and their affairs which concretely is a world of sin and darkness.⁴

11He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. Jesus’ ministry to Israel was often resisted and sometimes rejected.⁹

12But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, This happens when we are filled with divine life and are reborn as sons and daughters of the Father. This transformation takes place in Baptism.⁹ **to those who believe in his name,** To believe in his name meant that they believed that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and the eternal Son of God. Names are inseparable from persons in Semitic thinking. So, for instance, the Lord himself is invoked when his name is called upon in worship.⁹

13who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God. This birth as children of God has nothing to do with human generation, but is a special gift of God.⁴

14And the Word became flesh This is the central verse of the passage, stunning in its boldness! In Jewish thought, the Word of God is almost the opposite of flesh, which is regarded as transitory, mortal and imperfect.¹ **and made his dwelling among us,** This is the tremendous mystery of the incarnation, by which the eternal Word took on our exact human nature, becoming one with us in everything except sin.⁴ **and we saw his glory,** Glory is the visible manifestation of the presence of God. Though the Word concealed his glory in becoming flesh, this Gospel is witness to its having been perceived by men. John may be referring to the transfiguration at which he was present or he may mean the whole life of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word. Note that once John makes the

incarnation clear, he never again calls Christ the “Word”. The gospel is testimony NOT to the eternal Word but to the Word become flesh, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.⁴ **the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.**

15John testified to him and cried out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.’”

16From his fullness we have all received, **grace in place of grace,** Jesus brings a superabundance of gifts adding to the existing graces, all of which pour out of the one inexhaustible source, Jesus Christ, who is for ever full of grace. Even after this outpouring, he still remains full for he suffers no loss by giving his wealth to others.¹⁰ **17****because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.** While the Torah was God’s gift given through Moses, the fullness of God’s revelation has come only through Christ.⁴ However, the Law went no further than to indicate the way man ought to follow, but the grace brought by Jesus has the power to SAVE those who receive it.¹⁰

18**No one has ever seen God.** The Jewish belief was firm: God was an invisible God and could not be seen by man. John was probably thinking of Ex. 33:20-23 where Moses was not permitted to see the glory of God since no one may see God and live, but was allowed to see his back. But in the Incarnate Word God has been revealed completely for although only the Son sees the Father, through him we too see God with the eyes of faith.⁴ The only Son, who is at the Father’s side, This denotes intimacy.⁴ has revealed him. In Col 1:15 it says that Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

Some of the information for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, (2) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) “The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66” by Carroll Stublmüller, C.P., (4) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (5) The Commentary Notes of Tim Gray, (6) “The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets,” (7) “Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (8) “The Navarre Bible: Hebrews,” (9) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (10) “The Navarre Bible: St. John,” and (11) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.