



Celebrate

First Sunday of Christmas

December 31, 2023

The psalmist calls on the natural world, celestial bodies, fire and earth, creatures, and all humanity, to praise God. The voices of Simeon and 84-year-old Anna join the chorus today, recognizing what God is doing in Jesus. Simeon's song is often sung after communion, for we have seen God's salvation in the assembled community and have held Jesus in our hands in the bread. Then, like the prophet Anna, we tell of Jesus to all who look for the healing of the world.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and yet more wonderfully restored it. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading

Isaiah 61:10—62:3

To the people who returned to Jerusalem after the exile, the prophet proclaims that God's salvation will fully come to pass. Jerusalem will become a shining light to the nations and righteousness and praise will spring up as surely as the earth puts forth vegetation.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my
God;
for he has clothed me with the
garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of
righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a
garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with
her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its
shoots,
and as a garden causes what is
sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause
righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

^{62:1}For Zion's sake I will not keep
silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not
rest,
until her vindication shines out like
the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning
torch.

²The nations shall see your
vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new
name
that the mouth of the LORD will
give.

³You shall be a crown of beauty in the
hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of
your God.



Hallelujah! Praise the LORD ¹ from the heavens;
praise God ¹ in the heights.

²Praise the LORD, ¹ all you angels;
sing praise, all you ¹ hosts of heaven.

³Praise the LORD, ¹ sun and moon;
sing praise, all you ¹ shining stars.

⁴Praise the LORD, heav- ¹ en of heavens,
and you waters a- ¹ bove the heavens.

⁵Let them praise the name ¹ of the LORD,
who commanded, and they ¹ were created,

⁶who made them stand fast forev- ¹ er and ever,
giving them a law that shall not ¹ pass away. **R**

⁷Praise the LORD ¹ from the earth,
you sea monsters ¹ and all deeps;

⁸fire and hail, ¹ snow and fog,
tempestuous wind, do- ¹ ing God's will;

⁹mountains ¹ and all hills,
fruit trees ¹ and all cedars;

¹⁰wild beasts ¹ and all cattle,
creeping things and ¹ flying birds;

¹¹sovereigns of the earth ¹ and all peoples,
princes and all rulers ¹ of the world;

¹²young ¹ men and maidens,
old and ¹ young together. **R**

¹³Let them praise the name ¹ of the LORD,
whose name only is exalted,
whose splendor is over ¹ earth and heaven.

¹⁴The LORD has raised up strength for the people
and praise for all ¹ faithful servants,
the children of Israel, a people who are near
the LORD. ¹ Hallelujah! **R**

Second Reading

Galatians 4:4-7

Paul seeks to show the Galatians that the purpose of Christ's birth was to liberate us from the law's condemnation so that we would be fully adopted into God's family as beloved children.

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶And because you are

children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Gospel

Luke 2:22-40

Luke's narrative continues with stories that emphasize Jesus' connection to Judaism. His family is devout in its observance of the law, and Jesus himself is recognized as one who will bring glory to Israel.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, [Joseph and Mary] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

³³And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Trusting in God's good news of great joy for all people, we offer our prayers for ourselves, our neighbors, and the world God loves.

A brief silence.

You inspire faith in our hearts and call us to rejoice with our whole selves at the salvation you bring. Make our churches places of belonging for all people in the fullness of their being. Raise up the gifts and the witness of people who are neurodivergent, living with disability, or bearing invisible illness. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

Your praise is sung throughout creation in all times and seasons. As the new year turns, ground us in your changeless and sustaining love. Keep us attentive to the rhythms of the cosmos and inspire us to live in harmony with all the earth. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

Give hope and stamina to leaders who work tirelessly for the sake of the most vulnerable. We pray especially for organizations working on behalf of children to provide basic needs, to protect from abuse and neglect, to

address trauma, and to rescue from trafficking. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

Sustain all people who, like Simeon and Anna, have been waiting for salvation and wholeness (*especially*). We pray especially for anyone living with cancer or chronic illness, all people who are in physical rehabilitation or addiction recovery, and those experiencing complications from long COVID. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

Let this community of faith be a joyful and welcome place for all ages and generations. Teach us to honor the wisdom of children, the inquisitiveness of youth, the thoughtfulness of adults, and the knowledge of elders. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We give thanks for all the beloved who lived with expectation and departed this life in peace (*especially*). Sustain us in joy until we join them around your throne. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

Abide with us, O God of mercy, and receive our prayers according to your abundant grace.
Amen.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday (Name of Jesus) Numbers 6:22-27. **Tuesday** (Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehle, renewer of the church, 1872) Psalm 148. **Wednesday** Proverbs 1:20-33. **Thursday** Psalm 110. **Friday** Luke 6:27-31. **Saturday** (Epiphany of Our Lord) Matthew 2:1-12. **Baptism of Our Lord** Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11.

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