

The Readings on This Day

***Click on the links for the Bible Verse(s)

Christmas Eve

By the fourth century, Christians had adapted the Roman festival at the winter solstice as a day to celebrate the incarnation of God in Jesus. Christ is the Sun, bringing light and life to the world. For Christmas, all three years of the lectionary appoint both the Lukan infancy narrative and the poem that begins John's gospel. Assemblies that worship on Christmas Eve but not Christmas Day might use Palm/Passion Sunday as a model: Luke—the most beloved infancy story—can be proclaimed as a processional gospel at the one service, and John—the Bible's primary theological proclamation of the incarnation—can serve as the gospel of the day.



[Isaiah 9:2-7](#)

That the angels in Luke name the child the Messiah, in Greek “Christ,” recalls oracles such as Isaiah 9, and Christians have seen in Jesus Christ the ancient promises of a coming king fulfilled. Jesus is “wonderful Counselor and mighty God” among us. Thus Christians hear in this oracle references to the triune God.

[The Psalm for the Day](#)

[Psalm 96](#) is one of the praise songs that names God as king and was perhaps used by the ancient Israelites to laud a king at his enthronement. In response to Isaiah 9 and its proclamation of the birth of the Mighty God, Christians sing Psalm 96 to praise Christ as our king. All the gods, all families of all peoples, the very earth, the sea and the fields all rejoice. Even as we go home to enjoy our Christmas trees, we know that “all the trees of the wood” have shouted in praise to Christ. Yet we remember the promises of Advent: he comes to judge the world.

[Titus 2:11-14](#)

As is often the case, the second reading indicates the implications of the gospel for the church: the appearance of God in Jesus Christ creates a people redeemed, purified, and dedicated to a life of good works. Christ among us changes our identity, our style of life, and the goal of our existence

[Luke 2:1-14 \[15-20\]](#)

Luke 2, the only biblical narrative detailing the birth of Jesus, is proclaimed at the first eucharist of Christmas. In contrast to Matthew's interest in high status males, Luke emphasizes the opposite: a pregnant woman, “no place in the inn,” and lower-class shepherds. Thanks in part to Luke's talent in storytelling, this narrative has become for many people synonymous with Christmas. The challenge at this service is to proclaim the truth of this narrative as other than and far beyond stereotypical sentimentality.