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December 24, 2019

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“Sing to the Lord a new song” (Psalm 96).

Christmas

Night—*Isaiah 9:1-6; Ps 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14*

Dawn—*Isaiah 62:11-12; Ps 97; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:15-20*

Day—*Isaiah 52:7-10; Ps 98; Heb 1:1-6; John 1:1-18*

The Feast of Christmas is also a feast of Scripture readings that convey the faith being handed on to us from past generations going back to the beginning.

It is easy to see in Luke and Matthew’s infancy and birth narratives a strong echo of the creation story. The miraculous conceptions by Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary recall God’s hand in the beginning, when the entire universe sprang into being *ex nihilo*, as the divine Spirit hovered over the formless waters, reflecting the face of God on the face of the earth.

Some of Isaiah’s most beautiful prophecies remind us that even in failure, disobedience, exile and violence, God’s promises are unstoppable. “A people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us” (Isa 9:1; 6).

In Luke's familiar Christmas story, celestial harmonies announce the birth of the One who will restore the image and likeness of God to a broken world. Jesus is the firstborn of the new creation, the template for redeeming humanity from the distortions of sin and the curse of death. This is announced not to princes but to the poor and the meek, who will inherit the earth. Even the animals who breathe warmth on the family huddled at the manger know before a sleeping world that something momentous has happened that will change everything.

At the three Masses of Christmas, midnight, dawn and day, the mystery of the Incarnation, Immanuel, God-with-us, will be witnessed first by the shepherds, the lowliest of God's *anawim*, then to a widening circle of seekers, culminating in the mystic prologue of the fourth Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

We are invited to enter the story through the heart of Mary, who ponders each moment, weighing its implications and the suffering that lies ahead. For now, she shares the joy of the shepherds. We are drawn into the scene as both witnesses and participants, because the Incarnation is about us, too. By our union with Jesus and as baptized members of his body, we share in the new creation, the joining of divinity with humanity that is transforming us toward a new destiny, life with God. The two great feasts of faith, Christmas and Easter, come together in us. Jesus came to begin the redemption of history, but it must happen with and through all of us. Joy to the world; this is the joy of the Gospel.

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