

FIRST READING – X CHRISTMAS DAY

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”
Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of the Lord to Zion.
Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The Lord has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – X CHRISTMAS DAY

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors
in many and various ways by the Prophets,
but in these last days he has spoken to us by the Son,
whom he appointed heir of all things,
through whom he also created the ages.
He is the reflection of God's glory
and the exact imprint of God's very being,
and he sustains all things by his powerful word.
When he had made purification for sins,
he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
having become as much superior to Angels
as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.
For to which of the Angels did God ever say,
"You are my Son;
today I have begotten you"?
Or again,
"I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son"?
And again,
when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,
"Let all God's Angels worship him."



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – X CHRISTMAS DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

A reading from the holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of the human race.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.
The true light, which enlightens everyone,
was coming into the world.
He was in the world,
and the world came into being through him;
yet the world did not know him.
He came to what was his own,
and his own people did not accept him.
But to all who received him,
who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God,
who were born, not of blood
or of the will of the flesh
or of the will of man,
but of God.
And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father's only-begotten son,
full of grace and truth.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reading I: Isaiah 52:7-10

This magnificent passage from Second Isaiah is rather similar to the Old Testament reading for the second Mass ([Is 62:11-12](#)), and even closer to the enthronement psalms that form the responsorial reading for all three Masses of Christmas.

The prophet announces the return of Yhwh to Zion in words identical with those that scholars think were used at the new-year enthronement festival: “Your God reigns.”

This proclamation is described as bringing “good news.” The Hebrew word for “good news” lies at the root of the New Testament Greek term *euangelion*, or “gospel.”

Paul took up this very text and applied it to his own apostolic work of preaching the gospel in [Rom 10:15](#), and it probably influenced Jesus’ own formulation of his message of the kingdom or reign of God.

The use of this passage in the liturgy today suggests yet another application. It can be referred to the angelic proclamation at the Nativity. This is indeed a proclamation of good tidings, a publication of salvation, an announcement of the beginning of the dawn of God’s reign.

It is in the Incarnation that the church sees the return of Yhwh to Zion and to Jerusalem to comfort his people ([Is 40:1](#)). Here the Lord bares his arm and the people see his salvation.

Responsorial Psalm 98:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

Selections from this psalm also appear on the twenty-eighth and thirty-third Sundays of the year in series C. This selection is also very similar to the psalms used in the first and second Masses of this day and to the first reading of this Mass. Its applicability to Christmas is obvious.

Reading II: Hebrews 1:1-6

The letter to the Hebrews is unique among the letters of the New Testament. Although it clearly ends like a letter ([Heb 13:22-25](#)), it does not begin like one. There is no opening greeting, as was customary. There is no statement of the author’s name nor of those to whom he is writing. Instead, he plunges immediately into his theological exposition: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways ...”

Actually, Hebrews looks like a series of liturgical sermons on a collection of Old Testament texts. In fact, the author himself or the editor call the work a “word of exhortation” ([Heb 13:22](#)). The first of these sermons, whose exordium we have here, uses a series of texts to establish Christ’s superiority over the angels.

It is probable that the readers, presumably Jewish Christians with syncretistic leanings, wanted to rank Christ among a whole hierarchy of angelic mediators (see the later Gnostic aeons; also [Col 2:18](#)) and thus deny the uniqueness and finality of the revelation he brought.

The author prefaces his texts with what looks like an early Christian hymn to Christ, similar in theme to the Johannine prologue, which follows as the gospel for this Mass. The hymn in Hebrews seems to be based on an earlier Jewish hymn to Wisdom.

Wisdom existed with God from all eternity and was the agent of creation and preservation. She manifests herself on earth and then returns to heaven. In its Christian adaptation, the hymn identifies Christ with Wisdom as the agent of creation and preservation. He then appears on earth.

Note that the whole Christ event is covered by the words “when he had made purification for sins. ...” There is no explicit mention of his incarnation or earthly life as in most of the other hymns, although the author himself does add an allusion to his entry into the world in verse 6 (see also [Heb 2:14](#)).

After his sojourn on earth, Christ returns to heaven and is exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, triumphant over the angels, who are here conceived, as so often in early Christian mythology, as hostile powers.

A further point to be noted about this hymn is that it sets Christ’s revelation of God in Israel’s salvation history. The same God who has now spoken “in these last days” (that is, eschatologically) in his Son had spoken previously “in many and various ways.” In the Greek, the word for “many” brings out the fragmentary, partial character of the previous revelations.

This is a very important passage, for it relates the final revelation of God in Christ to the Jewish religion, and by analogy to other religions, too.

All religions contain fragmentary and partial disclosures of God, and each religion has its own distinctive insights. But what was fragmentary and partial is now finally and fully disclosed in Christ.

Here we have the biblical approach to the question of the non-Christian religions, which has exercised Christian thought so much since Vatican II: the claim that the final revelation is given exclusively in Jesus Christ.

Of course, our apprehensions of it are never final. The finality of the revelation must not be confused with any particular Christian theology or expression of the Christian religion, for all these are still fragmentary in character. Our claim is for Christ, not for our understanding of him.

This is not a piece of religious imperialism or triumphalism. It follows directly from the eschatological character of Christ’s revelation: God has spoken “in these last days,” not merely through the prophets but through his Son, the unique and final embodiment of his total self-disclosure.

Gospel: John 1:1-18 (long form); 1:1-5, 9-14 (short form)

It is fairly certain that the evangelist John did not himself compose the hymn to the Logos, but that it existed prior to his use of it. Yet, its origin is much in dispute.

Some think that it came from Gnostic sources; some regard it as a Hellenistic-Jewish hymn to Wisdom. It has even been suggested that it was a hymn to John the Baptist, celebrated in the “baptist” circles as the bearer of the final revelation of God.

It would then have been adapted by the evangelist for Christian use by adding a series of “footnotes” to the hymn: “He [the Baptist] was not the light,” etc. It is interesting that the short form of the gospel drops precisely these parenthetical notes.

Whatever its origin, the Johannine prologue sketches in the eternal background of what happened in the ministry, life, and death of Jesus. This whole ministry was the revelation of the Word-made-flesh, the embodiment in a human life of the totality of God’s self-communication to human beings. This self-communication did not begin with the Christ event; it began with creation (see [Heb 1:1-4](#)).

God created the universe in order to communicate God's self to it in love. God communicated himself to men and women throughout history. This God did especially, though not exclusively, in Israel's salvation history recorded in the Old Testament.

As the prologue puts it: "the life was the light of all people. ... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." The reception of this revelation (here the evangelist has in mind the consequence of the Incarnation) gives men and women the power to become children of God.

It is often debated just where John moves from the preexistent Christ to the incarnate Christ. Clearly he has done so by [Heb 1:14](#). Yet, the parentheses about the Baptist have the effect of changing the earlier statements about the Logos into statements about the Word-made-flesh. Thus, the whole Johanne prologue is a commentary on the rest of John's Gospel. The entire life of Christ is the story of the Word-made-flesh.

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