

In v. 7, Jesus is treated like any other newborn of the time: he is wrapped in cloths, but there may be a message in his being born in “a manger”: animals normally fed from it; Jesus is sustenance for the world. In vv. 8-14, we learn the meaning of Jesus’ birth. Those who hear the pronouncement by the angel are “shepherds” (v. 8), lowly people. David too was a shepherd; in Luke, Jesus comes to the poor, the lowly. The message of Christ’s birth is indeed a joyful one – for all.

V. 11 mentions our great claims as to who Jesus is: “Saviour”, “Messiah” and “Lord”. As “Saviour”, he restores us to wholeness, rescues us from sin and alienation from God. In Jesus, God is present with sinners and saves us from destructive self-isolation to union with him, in a nurturing community. As “Messiah”, he inaugurates the era of heavenly peace: the end-time has begun. As “Lord”, he is God come in human form. The kingdom is for all those whom God has chosen (v. 14b). © 1996-2020 Chris Haslam

~ Notices ~

‘Christmas Miscellany’ - an ecumenical service between the Anglican Diocese of Limerick and Killaloe and the Catholic Diocese of Killaloe recorded partially at St Columba’s Ennis and broadcast on YouTube and parish/diocesan websites - a link is on our website and YouTube channel. This is a landmark event for our dioceses, please watch if you can.

Prayers - Prayers are said daily for the welfare of our community, our nation and the world. If you have any particular issue that you would like to be prayed for, do please email me on frkevinobrien@me.com or call me on 065 672 4721.

YouTube - our YouTube channel now has over 120 videos, comprising services, talks and sermons. Please do visit the channel by searching for **St Columba’s Church Ennis** and do *subscribe* if you can. Also visit our **Facebook** page: **Drumcliffe Church of Ireland Ennis**

Services in the New Year Until further notice services in church are suspended. Our online services will, of course, continue.

Rector: Email: frkevinobrien@me.com Tel: 065 672 4721

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- Mission Charities -

The two charities being supported this year are below. Women’s Aid gives support and sanctuary to women and children suffering from domestic abuse - which has sadly greatly increased during the Covid 19 pandemic. Jigsaw supports young people who are struggling with their wellbeing and mental health - also a prevalent problem during so many months of lockdown and isolation.

Womens Aid **Jigsaw**
www.womensaid.ie www.jigsaw.ie

See the diocesan website for the Bishop’s address:
<http://www.limerick.anglican.org>

- Advent Wreath Prayer -

God our Father,
the Saviour is born
and those who live in darkness
are seeing a great light.
Help us, who greet the birth of Christ with joy,
to live in the light of your Son,
and to share the good news of your love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ,
the Light who has come into the world.



Christmas 2020
(Year B)

Collect

Christmas Eve: Eternal God, in the stillness of this night you sent your almighty Word to pierce the world’s darkness with

the light of salvation: give to the earth the peace that we long for and fill our hearts with the joy of heaven through our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Christmas Day: Lord Jesus Christ, your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth: accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you, our Saviour and our eternal God. **Amen**

Suggested Hymns - For the online service you might like to view these hymns with lyrics on YouTube.

- 1) Once In Royal David’s City
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdDeFgXXG-s>
- 2) Silent Night
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoBKXX4wvYk>
- 3) In the bleak Midwinter
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAJT9df1lko>
- 4) Hark The Herald Angels Sing
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLz4LbhS4_M

Isaiah 9: 2-7

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Psalms 96

Sing to the Lord a new song; ♦
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord and bless his name; ♦
tell out his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations ♦
and his wonders among all peoples.
For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; ♦
he is more to be feared than all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are but idols; ♦
it is the Lord who made the heavens.

Honour and majesty are before him; ♦
 power and splendour are in his sanctuary.
 Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples; ♦
 ascribe to the Lord honour and strength.
 Ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name; ♦
 bring offerings and come into his courts.
 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; ♦
 let the whole earth tremble before him.
 Tell it out among the nations that the Lord is king. ♦
 He has made the world so firm that it cannot be moved;
 he will judge the peoples with equity.
 Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad; ♦
 let the sea thunder and all that is in it;
 Let the fields be joyful and all that is in them; ♦
 let all the trees of the wood shout for joy before the Lord.
 For he comes, he comes to judge the earth; ♦
 with righteousness he will judge the world
 and the peoples with his truth.

Titus 2: 11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour,* Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Luke 2: 1-14

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
 and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

Commentary

Isaiah 9:2-7

In the preceding verse, Isaiah has recalled "the former time" when the northern territories, Zebulun and Naphtali, were conquered by the Assyrians. But, he writes, "in the latter time" God will return these lands to Israel: "he will make glorious [i.e. honour] ... Galilee". Israel, the northern kingdom, and Syria attacked Judah, the southern kingdom, in an attempt to secure Judah's help in throwing off Assyrian domination, but (against Isaiah's advice) King Ahaz of Judah formed an alliance with Assyria. The result was that Assyria annexed Zebulun and Naphtali (including Galilee) and Judah

paid a hefty annual tribute to Assyria. Judah also acquiesced to some Assyrian religious practices.

In its historical context, today's reading may relate to the birth of Ahaz's son, Hezekiah. Good things were expected of him; he was expected to be the light at the end of the tunnel; but Hezekiah did not fulfill the expectations expressed here. Isaiah later (11:1-9) transfers his hopes to a future, undefined, time.

Vv. 1-4 foresee Ahaz's heir restoring the northern territories. As when Gideon led the people of Israel to defeat the Midianites (v. 4), a vastly superior force, with God's help (Judges 7:15-25), the people will be freed from Assyrian oppression. Gideon's war was a holy one, and so will be the one with the Assyrians; in a holy war, the victor takes no bounty, so the spoils of war will be "burned" (v. 5). Then v. 6: the child, born to "us" (Judah), is a gift from God, powerful ("authority rests upon his shoulders"), a counsellor himself (so he will not be led astray as Ahaz was – by false counsellors), a caring and loving father to his people, and a king who brings peace and prosperity (as promised by God to David in 2 Samuel 7:16.) V. 7 reaffirms God's covenant with David regarding his dynasty. This kingdom will, through God's "zeal", be eternally based on justice and godliness. To us, Christ fulfills this promise.

Psalm 96

This psalm celebrates God's kingship. The singing of a "new" song signifies the start of a new era. (The Ark received a new cart for its journey to Jerusalem.) All peoples are invited to "sing to the Lord" and to share in God's kingship (v. 10a). Vv. 1-3 are a summons to worship. In vv. 4-5, God is more to be "revered" than other gods; in fact, all other gods are just idols; it is God who is creator. Then v. 8: recognize him as the supreme God! He is to be held in awe by all humanity (v. 9b). Then vv. 11-12: let the whole universe rejoice in God, now and when he comes as judge. His basis for judgement of all people will be godliness ("righteousness", v. 13) and truth.

Titus 2:11-14

In v. 1, the author has admonished his readers to "teach what is consistent with sound doctrine." They are to teach and practice good ethical behaviour, proper living in their life setting, the household, "so that the word of God may not be discredited" (v. 5).

How are they (and we) to do this? "The grace of God" (v. 11), personified in Christ, has come to bring salvation to all people, to enable us to renounce what is immoral, and to live virtuous lives. (God achieves for the faithful "training" (v. 12), true education – something of great value in Greco-Roman society.) We are to live virtuously while we await the second coming of Christ, who is God and Saviour (v. 13). Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was so that we might be cleansed from sin, be redeemed from slavery to sin to forgiveness of sins, be made godly, and be people who live ethically ("zealous for good deeds", v. 14).

Luke 2:1-14,(15-20)

Luke is concerned to place Jesus in the time-line of history, as a real human being. We know of Augustus' attempt to clean up the taxation system: as well as requiring more reasonable practices of tax collectors, he introduced a truly equitable tax: a poll-tax. Every 14 years, a census was held: people were required to present themselves in their ancestral towns, to register for the tax. Records are fragmentary but we do know that a census was held by "Quirinius" (v. 2) of Syria in 6-7 AD. Perhaps Judea was included in a census of 8-7 BC, "the first registration". From Matthew 2:16, we know that Herod the Great sought to kill Jesus by slaughtering all children aged two or less. Because Herod died in 4 BC, Jesus was born no later than 6 BC. The dates agree. Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem, the city of David, to "to be registered" (v. 5). Jesus is born in Bethlehem in fulfilment of the prophecy of Micah 5:2-5: a shepherd-king is to be born there.