

From the December 4, 2008, Issue

Christmas Year B

Christmas Day

Isa. 52:7-10 – Ps. 98 – Heb. 1:1-4, (5-12) - John 1:1-14

At Christmas, the people “lift up their voices, together they sing for joy... [They] break forth together into singing” (Isa 52.8-9). Why? Because “in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion” (52.8). Because of the presence of God’s saving reign, the reign of peace and truth, the reign of the Unconquerable Light (52.7; Jn 1.5). “The LORD has bared his holy arm in the sight of all the nations” (Isa 52.10), and all the ends of the earth shall see that “his right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory” (Ps 98.1-2). This is the victory of light over darkness, the victory of truth over lies (Jn 1.5).

The gospel of Christmas is that the light we have seen is not just a prophet or an angel, but rather God’s own Son, “the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Heb 1.1-3). The LORD’s own right hand has become flesh and dwelt among us, and it is this incarnate Right Hand who has gotten him victory. “The hills sing together for joy” because the Light has come to judge and destroy the darkness which enslaves us all (Ps 98.8). This is a victory not of brute force but of truth—the truth of humanity’s inclusion in the Triune Life through the incarnate Son. Adoption is reality, and we experience reality by believing in it (Jn 1.12). And as reality illumines everyone and everything (Jn 1.3,9), we hold to the living hope that “all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isa 52.10).

First Sunday of Christmas

Isa. 61:10-62:3 – Ps. 148 – Gal. 4:4-7 – Luke 2:22-40

Praise Yahweh, for it is Christmas! At the incarnation of the Triune Life, creation breaks forth in shouts of praise (Ps 148), singing: “He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness!” (Isa 61.10). We who have longed for redemption and consolation (Lk 2.25,38) now praise God, saying “My eyes have seen your salvation!” (2.30). What have we seen? We have seen a human child “growing” (Lk 2.40). The Greek word evokes the image of a blacksmith relentlessly pounding and shaping a stubborn piece of iron. By living out his Sonship within fallen human flesh, Jesus re-forged human nature, re-shaping the twisted mangled mess into “a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of God” (Isa 61.3).

By becoming one of us, he caused us to become one with him, “so that we might receive adoption as children” (Gal 4.5). “And because [we] are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (4.6). This good news is the “light for revelation” which will reveal “the inner thoughts of many;” Jesus is “a sign that will be opposed” by the darkness (Lk 2.32-35). But the darkness cannot extinguish the light (Jn 1.5). The light’s witnesses “will not keep silent”

and “will not rest, until vindication shines out like the dawn, and salvation like a burning torch” (Isa 62.1). The sovereign “Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up” (61.11), and “the nations shall see” it (62.2).

Second Sunday of Christmas

Jer. 31:7-14 – Ps. 147:12-20 – Eph. 1:3-14 – John 1:(1-9), 10-18

Before God made the universe, he gave it a destination; he destined it. One might say he “pre-destined” it. What is this absolutely sovereign pre-set destination? Christmas. Incarnation. The union of the Son and his creation, so that creation would share in the Son’s life with the Father in the Spirit. In other words, “He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1.5). There are countless paths we may choose (some more pleasant than others), but no path escapes the Omnipresent One. We may love him. We may hate him. But he (and our eternal union with him) is our destination regardless. For we have “been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will” (1.11).

And his purpose/counsel/will is “to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1.10). To exist in this universe is to live “in the heavenly places,” surrounded with “every spiritual blessing” (1.3). This has happened “not of... the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1.13). Still, it is possible to be ignorant of the God who is in us, to refuse to receive and believe him (Jn 1.10,12). “The good news of our salvation” is the truth no matter what (Eph 1.13). But if we choose to believe lies instead, we are powerless to experience an abundant and free life as God’s children (Jn 1.12). But his Spirit lives forever with us to tell us the truth—that we are indeed God’s children (Rom 8.16).

Our hearts may be frozen, but “He sends out his word and melts [ice]; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow” (Ps 147.18). He has become our father (Jer 31.9), and he now calls all nations to hear and believe (31.10). Christmas is the beginning of the world’s renewal: “They shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again... and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD” (Jer 31.12-14).

~ John Stonecypher