

Bible Study

Christmas (Readings from the Mass at Night)

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) My dear Jesus, at all times and in all places you surely are “God with us,” Emmanuel. How I cherish the life you came to give me! And I ask you to fill my heart again today with joy and peace as I reflect upon your words of love, your deeds of love and the signs of your loving presence. I ask this in your name, for you are God, in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

Focusing Questions:

1. What is your favorite Christmas carol? Why? (Want to sing a little of it??)
2. How does your family “keep Christ in Christmas”?
3. If God would grant you only 1 wish this Christmas, what would you wish for?

Commentary before the First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-6

This well-known passage from the Book of Isaiah was written at a time when the Assyrian army controlled both halves of the Hebrew nation, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Isaiah had scolded the Hebrew people for ignoring God’s call for repentance and a return to the faithful practice of their covenant faith with Him. Even though Isaiah said that God had used the Assyrians to punish the Hebrews as they deserved, he also penned this poem of joy, of hope for a leader who would lead them to freedom. Traditional Judaism still teaches that the Jewish people in exile will be redeemed by a Messiah who will usher in an age of righteousness and peace. Christians, however, see in this passage a prophecy which the Child Messiah already fulfilled, freeing God’s people from the bondage of sin and death, a slavery even more terrible than that of the Assyrians.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Look up Judges 6:1 and Judges 7:1, 9, and 25 to understand the victory over the Midians that Isaiah was comparing to the future freedom from the oppressive Assyrians.
2. Discuss how sin is like the yoke over the shoulders which a slave used to carry heavy loads for his/her master?
3. In what way is sin also a “darkness” from which Jesus frees God’s people?
4. From the lineage of which great king would the future Child-Savior be born?
5. Let’s speculate about those symbolic names: what personality characteristics would one possess who was called “Wonder-Counselor”? “God-Hero”? “Father-Forever”? “Prince of Peace”?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14

Titus was a Gentile Christian who became one of Saint Paul’s assistants. He was a skilled resolver of conflicts, most notably between Saint Paul and the Church at Corinth, and a successful fundraiser of donations for the suffering Christians in Jerusalem. His final assignment was to develop and shepherd the young Church on the island of Crete. Saint Titus died there, after appointing elders (“presbyters”) to continue his work. Saint Paul wrote these words of hope and vision in the middle of his letter to Titus, advising him on his ministry.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. On which other great feast in the Church’s liturgical year could we also rightly hear this reading? Explain.
2. “Grace” means “gift.” In what way is grace a gift? What does it actually give us?
3. In what way was Jesus a gift from God?
4. Saint Paul actually refers in this passage to a past gift from God, a present gift, and a future gift – all delivered through Jesus Christ. Identify the 3 gifts.
5. Which responsibilities does Saint Paul say are given to those who believe?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Luke 2:1-20 (combined from Masses at Midnight and Dawn)

Saint Luke was not a first-hand witness to Jesus’ ministry; he became a follower of Jesus through the preaching of Saint Paul. The unique details in his Gospel have led to speculation that Saint Luke was a friend of the Blessed Virgin Mary and that Mary herself might have recounted these great events to Saint Luke. Only his account of the birth of Jesus contains such intimate details as we find in this reading.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Which images in this wonderful story are particular favorites of yours?
2. Why did Mary and Joseph travel from 90 miles north of Jerusalem to a town 5 miles south of the city? (Imagine being 9 months pregnant and riding a donkey for 95 miles!)
3. Identify the 2 details in verses 7-10 which Saint Luke perhaps included to show God's special love for the poor.
4. How do we know that the shepherds were Jewish, not pagan workers who lived in the area?
5. What was the shepherds' reaction to seeing the Baby Jesus in the manger?
6. What do you think Saint Luke meant by verse 19 and why do you think he included that detail?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. In your own words, why did God choose to take on human flesh and come to this earth as a baby, rather than working a mighty miracle or coming as a great military leader who just seemed to appear as an adult "out of nowhere"?
2. Jesus came, according to the First Reading, to overturn darkness and gloom. How, then, do you explain all the sadness, evil, and tragedy still present in our age?
3. How do you try to spread the Good News that God was incarnated 2000+ years ago in order to save us?
4. Being just 1 believing person among millions of non-believers on this earth, what difference does it truly make how hard you try to witness to your faith?
5. What is it like for a person to have God's favor rest on him or her?
6. This Christmas, what in your life is being renewed, or what would you like to be renewed?

Closing Prayer (adapted from a former Alternate Opening Prayer for the Mass at Dawn on Christmas Day)

Almighty God, Father of light, a child is born for us and a son is given to us, your Eternal Word who came down from heaven and was born in the silent watches of the night. Now your Church is filled with wonder at the nearness of her God. Open our hearts to receive your life, and increase our ability to recognize your presence, so that our lives may be filled with your glory and your peace, who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.