



FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS

FIRST READING: Isaiah 63:7-9

A reading from Isaiah.

⁷I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD,
the praiseworthy acts of the LORD,
because of all that the LORD has done for us
and the great favor to the house of Israel
that he has shown them according to his mercy,
according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

⁸For he said, “Surely they are my people,
children who will not act deceitfully,”
and he became their savior
⁹in all their distress.

It was no messenger or angel
but his presence that saved them;
in his love and pity it was he who redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

Word of God, word of life. *or* The word of the Lord.

PSALMODY: Psalm 148

SECOND READING: Hebrews 2:10-18

A reading from Hebrews.

¹⁰It was fitting that God,
for whom and through whom all things exist,
in bringing many children to glory,
should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

¹¹For the one who sanctifies
and those who are sanctified all have one Father.
For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters,
¹²saying,

“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

FIRST READING *Isaiah = eye-ZAY-uh*

On this side of Bethlehem we hear the words of the prophet as a concise summary of the mystery of Christmas—the mystery of the incarnation. “It was no messenger or angel” (in the manger!) but the very “presence” of God that “saved them.” It is a very brief text. The reader can afford to take extra time. Share the sense of wonder in the text.

SECOND READING

It is a bit startling to contemplate the suffering and death of Jesus this close to Christmas. Yet this is what the reading does. That startling contrast can help to drive the reading. It is complicated writing.

¹³And again,
“I will put my trust in him.”
And again,
“Here am I and the children whom God has given me.”

¹⁴Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood,
he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death
he might destroy the one who has the power of death,
that is, the devil,

¹⁵and free those who all their lives
were held in slavery by the fear of death.

¹⁶For it is clear that he did not come to help angels
but the descendants of Abraham.

¹⁷Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect,
so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of
God,
to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.

¹⁸Because he himself was tested by what he suffered,
he is able to help those who are being tested.

Word of God, word of life. or The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Matthew 2:13-23

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

¹³Now after [⌈]the magi[⌋] had left,
an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,
“Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt,
and remain there until I tell you,
for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

¹⁴Then Joseph got up,
took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt
¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod.

This was to fulfill
what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet,
“Out of Egypt I have called my son.” ▶

Invest some time in understanding the author’s point so that you may help the hearer to do the same. The “direct quotes” of our Lord in verses 12 and 13 provide a challenge to the reader. Take your time. A pause of some substance after each preceding comma will help us “hear the quotation marks” without the reader actually saying “quote” and “unquote.”

GOSPEL *Jeremiah = jehr-uh-MY-uh Ramah = RAY-muh Archelaus = ar-kuh-LAY-us*
The story contains considerable drama; allow it to surface naturally. Note that verses 15b, 17, and 18 have a parenthetical sound to them yet demand a degree of passion. The words *Ramah* and *Archelaus* and *Nazarene* serve as helpful reminders that, although we have read these texts many times before, even the most seasoned reader is well served by careful preparation and rehearsal.

¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi,
he was infuriated,
and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem
who were two years old or under,
according to the time that he had learned from the magi.
¹⁷Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:
¹⁸“A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

¹⁹When Herod died,
an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt
and said,
²⁰“Get up, take the child and his mother,
and go to the land of Israel,
for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.”
²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother,
and went to the land of Israel.
²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling Judea
in place of his father Herod,
he was afraid to go there.
And after being warned in a dream,
he went away to the district of Galilee.
²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth,
so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled,
“He will be called a Nazarene.”

The gospel of the Lord.