

Dear Friends in Christ,

I trust your Christ's Mass was blessed?

The "prince of this world" has struck again in Pakistan. 38 additional people have died in the ensuing riots. The killing of an individual is bad enough but the ensuing chaos is commonly worse. The shame of it is the belief that out of the chaos there will rise a new order that will somehow justify all the pain and suffering which have occurred.

To those of you who are not Episcopalians, these readings may not correlate with yours? For reasons I am not kin to, the Episcopal Church is reverting to our Book of Common Prayer for the Christmas lessons. For comments and discussion, please contact me at the e-mail address below.

Nevergold Paul R. [prnbuffalo.mac@mac.com]

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS All Years

As you know, Christmas is merely a contraction of Christ's Mass and a celebration of the birth of the Christ, the anointed one of God. Just as we have changed the celebration of the birthdays of Lincoln and Washington to Presidents' Day, for various reasons early Christians decided to celebrate the birth of Jesus around the time of the Winter Solstice (Dec. 21) similar to many other cultures. As Christianity became dominant, the other celebrations faded. There is no biblical evidence that even remotely suggests that Jesus was actually born around December 25. The shepherds watching their flocks by night actually suggests spring time. As mentioned last week, regardless of when Jesus was actually born, celebrating his birth at the darkest time of the year makes the symbolic sense of The Light coming into the world just when we need it the most.

Isaiah 61:10-63:3

As those of you who have been reading my "rants" should know by now, this passage is from second Isaiah and was written just prior to the downfall of Babylon. This is stunning poetry and true to the Jewish form where the indented line repeats or reinforces the line before.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
 my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
 he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
 and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
 and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
 to spring up before all the nations.
For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
 and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
 and her salvation like a burning torch.
The nations shall see your vindication,
 and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name

that the mouth of the LORD will give.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

1. What is the mood projected? _____

2. List the upbeat images.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

3. We have gone from the hope and expectation of Advent to the fulfillment of Christmas.

Psalm 147

The Psalms 146-150 all begin and end with hallelujah – praise the Lord.

1. Hallelujah!

How good it is to sing praises to our God! *
how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

2. The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem; *
he gathers the exiles of Israel.

3. He heals the brokenhearted *
and binds up their wounds.

4. He counts the number of the stars *
and calls them all by their names.

5. Great is our LORD and mighty in power; *
there is no limit to his wisdom.

6. The LORD lifts up the lowly, *
but casts the wicked to the ground.

7. Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; *
make music to our God upon the harp.

8. He covers the heavens with clouds *
and prepares rain for the earth;

9. He makes grass to grow upon the mountains *
and green plants to serve mankind.

10. He provides food for flocks and herds *
and for the young ravens when they cry.

11. He is not impressed by the might of a horse; *
he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;

12. But the LORD has pleasure in those who fear
him, *
in those who await his gracious favor.

13. Worship the LORD, O Jerusalem; *
praise your God, O Zion;

14. For he has strengthened the bars of your gates;
*
he has blessed your children within you.

15. He has established peace on your borders; *
he satisfies you with the finest wheat.

16. He sends out his command to the earth, *
and his word runs very swiftly.

17. He gives snow like wool; *
he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.

18. He scatters his hail like bread crumbs; *
who can stand against his cold?

19. He sends forth his word and melts them; *
he blows with his wind, and the waters flow.

20. He declares his word to Jacob, *
his statutes and his judgments to Israel.

21. He has not done so to any other nation; *

to them he has not revealed his judgments.
Hallelujah!

1. Who is in charge? _____
2. Life is _____

Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7

Galatians is sometimes called the "Magna Carta of Christian liberty" by dealing with the question, "Do you have to become Jewish in order to become a Christian?" You don't! and isn't that good news? If you read all the precepts of "The Law" (and there over 300) and try to follow them, it can drive you nuts.

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

1. Are we justified by works or faith? _____
2. So we are no longer slaves but _____
 - a. And if children, then _____
3. And ain't a that good news? _____

John 1:1-18

According to one of my sources, this prologue is among the best Greek in the Christian Scripture.

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 all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 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 son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

1. Just read it again.
2. Now think about it, in the worst of times – war, pestilence, assassinations – has the darkness ever overcome the light? _____
3. When we read scripture correctly the themes keep coming through:
 - a. Love God
 - b. Do justice
 - c. Look after the helpless.
 - d. Love your enemies as well as your neighbors.