

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day
Cycles ABC RCL
Proper II
Revised

Isaiah 62:6-12

The last collection of prophecies in the book of Isaiah, the so-called “Third Isaiah” (Isaiah 56–66), derives from the period after Cyrus allowed the Jews of Babylon to return to their own land (538 BCE). Today's lesson, however, is more like the prophecies of the Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55), especially in vss. 10-12, than it is like Third Isaiah. Second Isaiah idealized the return to Zion before the conquest of Cyrus made it a reality, and so a later editor probably included this prophecy here for completeness.

Psalms 97

Researchers like S. Mowinckel have characterized this *hymn* as an “enthronement psalm” because of the reference to Yahweh as ruler (Hebrew: *adonai malax*, 96:10), and thought that it derived from a New Year’s liturgy that enthroned Yahweh as king for the upcoming year. This “enthronement psalm” describes how the other gods (*kol elohim*) have fallen on their faces before Yahweh, and how those who “serve iron [statues]” and praise powerless entities will be ashamed of themselves (vs. 7) for their foolishness.

Titus 3:4–7

The Pastoral Epistles, 1-2 Timothy and Titus derive from an unknown author who wrote during the first third of the second century CE. Written under the pseudonym “Paul,” the Pastorals appear to be written against Christians who have accepted certain esoteric and other-worldly ideas into their faith. These “Gnostic” Christians, despised all things material and understood salvation to be salvation out of the material world. Our author in this passage reiterates Paul’s consistent emphasis upon salvation by God’s mercy instead of by our righteous works. Unlike Paul, however, the writer believes that a material act, Baptism (literally in vs. 5: “bath of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit”), is the actual means of salvation.

Luke 2:1–20

Augustus was Emperor 27 BCE–14 CE and was remembered as the Emperor who brought peace to the entire civilized world. The Greek cities of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) adopted September 23 as their New Year as well as the birthday of the divine Augustus, acclaiming him on that occasion to be “savior” and peacemaker. Luke has borrowed this tradition to present Jesus as the true savior and peacemaker. Augustus deposed Herod the Great’s son, Archelaus and annexed Judea to Syria, installing Quirinius (Publius Sulpicius Quirinius) as *legatus* (governor) of Syria in 6 CE. Quirinius immediately set about reworking the administration of Judaea into that of a Roman province. The fact that Luke 1:5 has Herod as king of Judaea and Quirinius as governor of Syria at the same time (Luke 2:2) produces a discrepancy of ten years that is still a matter of investigation by researchers.