

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day
Cycles ABC RCL
Proper I
Revised

Isaiah 9:2-7

Albrecht Alt suggested that Isaiah 8:23-9:6 (English 9:1-7) is a royal accession hymn composed—perhaps by Isaiah—for the coronation of King Hezekiah in 715 BCE. Our lesson does follow the wording and structure of Egyptian accession hymns, but Isaiah’s authorship is not certain. Likewise uncertain is the identity of the king involved. Following Judah’s tradition of divine kingship, Israel welcomed each new king not only as a wise administrator and defender of the realm but also as a divine being, a “mighty God” (9:6). Vs. 5 (“As for each boot that marches noisily and cloak rolled in blood, it will be fuel for burning.” Hebrew vs. 4.) may be disconcerting to some readers because of its depiction of the bloody end of oppression from the large nations surrounding Judah. Be that as it may, the poet believes that the new king will be able to put Judah’s constant warfare with its enemies to a speedy end.

Psalm 96

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). Mowinckel believed enthronement psalms belonged to a liturgy for the New Year that enthroned Yahweh as king of Israel and, indeed, as king of the whole world for the coming year. Not all have adopted the idea of an enthronement festival, but researchers would agree that the *adonai malax* hymns are distinctive among the hymns of the Psalter. Samuel Terrien believes that Psalm 96 is late and derives from the time of the Exile, but there is nothing in the psalm that demand an early date.

Titus 2:11–14

The unknown author of the Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Timothy and Titus), who wrote during the first third of the second century CE, defended both the traditional Greco-Roman morality and the Jewish origins of Christian faith against the attacks of certain Gnostic Christians who resisted any kind of moral constraint or historical lineage as being a tie to this corrupt world. The author reminds readers in vs. 11 that Christ came to save all people, not just those who have received enlightenment from an esoteric *gnosis* (“knowledge”). See 1 Timothy 2:4.

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.