

# **Christmas Season**

## **Colour: white**

### **Ist Sunday of Christmas Year A**

#### **First Reading Isaiah 63.7-9**

**7 I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us— yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses.**

**8 He said, Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me; and so he became their Saviour.**

**9 In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.**

#### **What's going on?**

These words of Isaiah are used to remind us of what God did when he sent Jesus into the world to be born as one of us. Isaiah is talking about God's faithfulness to the people of Israel in ancient time, and how God sees human beings as his own children, his creation, and cares about what happens to us. Because he shares in our sorrows and struggles, God moves to save us. Because he loves us, he acts to help us. For Christians, this help and salvation is supremely seen in Jesus, who is God come to be with us to share our life and to save us.

#### **Psalm 148 (RC 147)**

**1 Praise the LORD.**

**Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above.**

**2 Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts.**

**3 Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars.**

**4 Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.**

**5 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.**

**6 He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.**

**7 Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,**

**8 lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding,**

**9 you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars,**

**10 wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds,**

**11 kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth,**

**12 young men and maidens, old men and children.**

**13 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.**

**14 He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart.**

**Praise the LORD.**

### **What's going on?**

**This psalm is a song of joyful praise in which all parts of creation are told to join in praising God. This psalm is suggested because it is an appropriate response to the God's goodness in sending us Jesus. The psalm unites earth and heaven in a hymn of praise, angels, mountains, animals, kings and children should all unite in praising God. It is not just human beings who should be glad that God is good, but the whole of the universe and everything in it.**

### **Hebrews 2.10-18**

**10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.**

**11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.**

**12 He says,**

**I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.**

**13 And again,**

**I will put my trust in him.**

**And again he says,**

**Here am I, and the children God has given me.**

**14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—**

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

**16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.**

**17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.**

**18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.**

### **What's going on?**

**This passage from the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament, tells us more about why Jesus was born as a human being and so helps us to understand why we have celebrated Christmas. Jesus had to be born as a human being in order to experience human life and know what it is like to be human. Also, human beings not only live, but die, so Jesus had to live and die as we do. But Jesus, as God's son, was able to do more than this and get rid of the barriers that can separate us from God. So through Jesus, no one has to be frightened of death or worried about what happens to us after death any more. If we believe and trust in the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection, then we become part of God's family for ever.**

### **Gospel Matthew 2.13-23**

#### **The Escape to Egypt**

**13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.**

**14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,**

**15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: Out of Egypt I called my son.**

**16 When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.**

**17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:**

**18A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.**

#### **The Return to Nazareth**

**19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt**

**20 and said, Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.**

**21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.**

**22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee,**

**23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: He will be called a Nazarene.**

### **What's going on?**

**The gospel takes us back to the Christmas story and to a part of the story unique to Matthew's version. Matthew wants to show that the prophets of old were talking about things which referred directly to Jesus' life. So Matthew reports that Joseph took his family to Egypt to hide from King Herod's attempts to kill the child whom he believed would supplant him. They come back when Herod has died and it is safe to bring Jesus and Mary back into Israel. Matthew then tells us that the family goes to live in the region of Galilee in the town Nazareth. Matthew matches up this story of exile and return with prophetic passages which speak of the same things. Another important perspective is the communication Joseph has with the heavenly world. As the protector of Mary and Jesus, and as a loving father, Joseph mirrors God's will for all humanity.**

### **Why these passages?**

**After Christmas, we start to learn more about Jesus' life, and the gospel story reminds us that although the birth of a baby is a cause for joy and celebration, there is also the vulnerability and precariousness of human life. Human beings can die or be killed and this is not only true of what could happen to the baby Jesus but also addresses the fears and uncertainty of each one of us. So the first passage assures us that God wants to save us and free us from the fear of death. The letter to the Hebrews tells us what Jesus' part in this is. His purpose is to experience all that vulnerability and suffering and through his own death, make it possible for all human beings to enter into heaven to be with God. These passages help us to get beyond the simple narrative of the story and into the 'why' of Christian faith.**