



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

***December 25, 2010***  
***Christmas Day***  
***Al Krass***

RCL: Isaiah 52:7 – 10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1 – 4 (5 – 12); John 1:1 – 14  
LM: Isaiah 52:7 – 10; Psalm 98:1, 2 – 3, 3 – 4, 5 – 6; Hebrews 1:1 – 6; John 1:1 – 18 or  
1:1 – 5, 9 – 14

Psalm 98, a great hymn of joy, easily applies to Christmas morning. The suggestions of nativity in it are: the making known of God's victory (vv. 2ff.) and the claim that the Lord "is coming to judge the earth" (v. 9). The Lord's judgment will be done with righteousness and to establish equity, which is in harmony with everything we affirm about the way God works when we seek, through our advocacy, to promote justice and equity. As we work, for example, to see immigrants receive full food stamps benefits and access to poverty-reduction programs, we serve the King, who will rule the world in justice. Like the physical world, we rejoice at our Lord's coming.

Today's readings bring us back to Second Isaiah, the prophet of the Exile. Israel is still in captivity in Babylon. Today's oracle promises deliverance. Those waiting in prison (52:2) are informed: you're going home! (The messenger who brings these welcome words is probably the prophet himself.) Chapter 40's reassuring words are fulfilled – Israel is comforted because she is freed, redeemed from prison. Like Israel, the entire earth will see that the God of Zion reigns.

What an opportunity this is to clarify why we engage in public witness. God's redemption takes place on a world-historical plane. We can't reduce the good news to personal testimony about the hearts of individual believers. To say, "I've been saved by Christ" is to say, "The one who has saved me and other believers is the Lord who is about the business of remaking the world. He is Lord of all creation." We live in an interim time – between the rule of the world's powers and God's reign. In our hearts we've already enthroned Christ. The direction of God's salvation in Christ is toward his universal lordship.

Hebrews I is a beautiful paean of praise to just such a Son-born-to-be-ruler.

John's Prologue is rich with meaning, chiefly around the themes of light and life. There are many ways to connect those themes and the birth of Christ to the kind of work God wants us to do as we follow Christ. I will explore two:

- We live in a world of moral darkness, into which God has sent the light of Christ. A struggle goes on between the darkness and the light. The light is destined to enlighten everyone, but those who belong to the darkness still struggle to maintain their hegemony. When we call for food-justice and when we call for a radical change in society so that poverty will be eliminated, those who hold power don't willingly yield. Although we behave in nonviolent ways, we can't stop testifying. Until the darkness disappears and God's people live in the light, God will not rest – nor will we.

- The Son born into this world is the Word present with God at creation. Through him life has entered the world. Although one with God, he emptied himself (Phil 2:6 – 8) and “pitched his tent among us” (E. V. Rieu's literal translation of verse 14). The church that wants to identify with the Son needs to do the same: not to simply offer help from a dominant position above, but to identify with and live among the humble of the earth. To do this we may need to divest ourselves of our wealth, of our social privilege.

Years ago the congregation I served, which had just united with another church, responded to a request from the Red Cross to make its former sanctuary into a homeless shelter. It was Christmas Eve. I went to the 7-11 not far from that building, where my office still was, for a hot dog. I remarked to the woman behind the counter that for the first time since that structure was built, there would be no Christmas Eve service there. I told her why. “But isn't that what the Christmas story is all about, Pastor?” she replied.

### ***Children's Time***

Consider using the story told in the reflection above or another story from your own experience to illustrate what Christmas is all about. Remind the children that we often remember the traditions we have at Christmas that we observe year after year, but it's also the surprises that break into our lives that remind us what the season means.

### ***Musical Suggestions***

Joy to the World! – PH 40

From Heaven Above – PH 54

Born in the Night, Mary's Child – NCH 152