

Isaiah 62:6-12

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,
I have posted sentinels;
all day and all night
they shall never be silent.
You who remind the LORD,
take no rest,
and give him no rest
until he establishes Jerusalem
and makes it renowned throughout the earth.
The LORD has sworn by his right hand
and by his mighty arm:
I will not again give your grain
to be food for your enemies,
and foreigners shall not drink the wine
for which you have labored;
but those who garner it shall eat it
and praise the LORD,
and those who gather it shall drink it
in my holy courts.
Go through, go through the gates,
prepare the way for the people;
build up, build up the highway,
clear it of stones,
lift up an ensign over the peoples.
The LORD has proclaimed
to the end of the earth:
Say to daughter Zion,
"See, your salvation comes;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him."
They shall be called, "The Holy People,
The Redeemed of the LORD";
and you shall be called, "Sought Out,
A City Not Forsaken."

The Psalm

Psalm 97 Page 726, BCP

Dominus regnavit

The LORD is King;
let the earth rejoice; *
let the multitude of the isles be glad.

2
Clouds and darkness are round about him, *
righteousness and justice are the foundations of his throne.

3
A fire goes before him *
and burns up his enemies on every side.

4
His lightnings light up the world; *
the earth sees it and is afraid.

5
The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD, *
at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.

6
The heavens declare his righteousness, *
and all the peoples see his glory.

7
Confounded be all who worship carved images
and delight in false gods! *
Bow down before him, all you gods.

8
Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Judah rejoice, *
because of your judgments, O LORD.

9
For you are the LORD,
most high over all the earth; *
you are exalted far above all gods.

10
The LORD loves those who hate evil; *
he preserves the lives of his saints
and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

11
Light has sprung up for the righteous, *
and joyful gladness for those who are truehearted.

12
Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous, *
and give thanks to his holy Name.

The Epistle

Titus 3:4-7

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus

Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The Gospel

Luke 2:(1-7) 8-20

[In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.]

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

What night is this? (Christmas Eve) What do we celebrate this night? (Santa will come, Jesus' birth)

Whose birthday is it? (Jesus' birthday!)

Yes, it's Jesus' birthday that we celebrate. Each year, on this night, we remember the birth of baby Jesus in that manger. We remember the star in the sky, and the angels singing, and the shepherds coming down from the hillside where they were with their sheep to see the remarkable thing that the angels told them about...a newborn Savior who would help all the people.

It's like the angels invited those shepherds to a birthday party for baby Jesus, isn't it?

Now, how many of you have had a birthday party this year?

And what happened at that birthday party? You played games, and ate a delicious birthday cake, and you got lots of presents. It was a lot of fun, wasn't it? What was your favorite gift this past year?

We all love birthday parties, not least of all because we get presents.

So now we're celebrating a birthday...but what happens tonight when you go to sleep?

Santa comes and brings you presents.

But wait a minute...it's not YOUR birthday, is it?

It's Jesus' birthday. So how come we get the gifts? Shouldn't baby Jesus get the gifts? Did we forget whose birthday it is?

I'm confused. So I need you to help me figure it out.

So here's a question for you: why do you get a gift? Maybe it's something you want, and you've been talking about it for a while. But do you think we get a gift because someone loves us and cares about us, and wants to give us something special to show that love?

And you will be getting gifts tonight, aren't you? Santa will bring things because Santa loves you, and you may also get presents from other people who love you and want you to enjoy something fun. All gifts come to us because someone loves us and wants us to be happy.

But you are also getting another gift, this night and every Christmas, something that's more important than a Wii game or an American Girl doll. What's that gift?

It's Jesus! That little baby, born over 2000 years ago, is the best gift ever. What did the angel said to the shepherds on that hillside: "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people, all the sad people, all the people who are poor, all the people who are without a job, all the people who are away from home serving in the armed forces, all the people who don't have a home of their own. Here is why you should celebrate: this evening a baby was born, and he is a very special baby. He will be a Savior, an anointed one who will help all those who are suffering. You won't find him in a great big palace, as you

would expect for a King. No, you'll find him in a stable, wrapped up to keep him nice and warm and snug, with animals around him to help him stay warm."

And all of a sudden there were lots of angels singing, and of course the shepherds had to go check out this baby who was to be Lord of all.

And the shepherds went down to see him, and sure enough it was a tiny little baby in a stable. He didn't really look like any other baby – no, there was a glow around him that made them feel like this was something extra special. The moment they saw him, they loved him, and they didn't notice the cold of the night because they felt the warmth of his love coming right back at them! It was like he was a gift for them, spreading all that love to them.

Did those shepherds bring any presents to baby Jesus? It was his birth day, after all. But they didn't have a place to make a birthday cake, and no stores were open that late at night.

What present could they bring him? Maybe some soft wool from one of the little lambs to keep the baby warm. Maybe a little cheese made from the milk of one of the sheep, even though Jesus was too little to eat cheese yet.

But I know one thing for certain.

Those shepherds brought Jesus their own love, and their belief in what the angel had said. They came to worship him, because they knew that he was God's greatest gift to a troubled world.

So what would you like to give to Jesus as a birthday present?

How about being a good boy or girl? How about listening when mom or dad asks you to do something? How about saying a prayer every night before you go to bed, talking to Jesus about your day? How about being nice to someone who is sad?

Gifts don't always come in boxes with colored paper and ribbons. Sometimes they are doing things that mean more than a toy. So this night, even while we're all excited about the gifts that will be under the tree tomorrow morning, let's think about gifts we can give the birthday boy, baby Jesus. The gifts that we give him don't cost money. They are way more valuable than that. He is the best gift to us, and he deserves our most wonderful gifts of love and caring and sharing in return.

Amen.