

The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

TODAY* **

Isaiah 9:1–6
Titus 2:11–14
Luke 2:1–14

MONDAY

Matthew 10:17–22

"... the one who endures to the end will be saved."

TUESDAY

John 20:1A, 2–8

"... he saw and believed."

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 2:13–18

"Out of Egypt I have called my son."

THURSDAY

Luke 2:22–35

"... for my eyes have seen your salvation..."

FRIDAY* ***

Luke 2:22–40

"... the favor of God was upon him."

SATURDAY

John 1:1–18

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us..."

*Alternate readings exist for this day.
 **Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord
 ***Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

The Stories of Jesus and Santa

There are two stories we often hear about at this time of year. One involves Santa and the other is about Jesus.

Santa's story can be heard in a song: *Santa Claus Is Coming to Town*. In this song, we are told that Santa is a wonderful old man who brings gifts to those who are good. But only to those who are good. If you cry or pout, if you are nasty or bad—forget it! Santa is not coming to you.

We should, of course, strive to be as good as we can be. But the goodness found in Santa's story is very different than the goodness referred to in Jesus' story. In today's Gospel, the angels announce that Jesus is the one who brings "joy to all the people." Santa comes to those who are good. Jesus comes to all—both the good and bad alike.

What is revealed in the story of Jesus is that Christmas is not about our goodness. It is about God's goodness and his grace. What we celebrate on this feast day is not the good things that we have done, but the great thing that God has done in Christ Jesus. Jesus' story reveals the love of God, which is promised prior to any of our merits and present despite all of our sins.

So, unlike Santa, Jesus comes to us not because we are good, but because we need him—because we are sinful, broken, and weak. God's love is not based on our accomplishments, but on his free choice. This is the basis of Christmas joy. *This is the Good News.*



The Faith of the Church

Pope Pius XII marveled at the unity of the human race. All people share a common origin in God, a common nature of body and soul, a shared dwelling on this earth, and a singular supernatural end who is God. Moreover, all humans are united because Jesus came to lead all of us to God (Cf. *Summi Pontificatus*, #3).



Questions of the Week

The Good News of Christmas is that Christ came to save all people. Thereby, Jesus challenges us to extend our love as wide as possible. God allows the sun to shine on both the good and the bad. Thus, we are called to love our enemies (see Matt 5:43–45).

Adults

In light of God's graciousness to me, what steps can I take to make peace with those who have offended me?

Children

Since Jesus has loved and forgiven me, how can I forgive others who have made fun of or hurt me?

Visit us at www.FaithFirst.com (click on "Gospel Reflections") and share today's Gospel reading as a family.

Responding to God's Word . . .

Santa's news is that if you are good, you might receive a new computer or even a new car. Jesus' news is better. When we have sinned, failed, or been selfish, Jesus assures us that we can still receive the love of God, if we open our hearts. God's love can destroy evil. It is stronger than death itself.

If we borrowed Santa's melody, Jesus' song might go like this:

*There's no need to watch out.
It's okay if you cry.
You can sing or you can pout,
I'm telling you why.
Jesus Christ is coming to you.*

*He's forgotten his list.
He forgives more than twice.
He's the Lord of us all,
both the naughty and nice.
The Prince of Peace is coming
to you.
He sees you when you're sleeping.
He knows when you're awake.
He saves you if you're bad or good
with a power no sin can break.
So—put sadness aside.
Let loose with a cry.
There's no reason to hide,
I'm telling you why.
The Love of God is coming to you!*

SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

In the home. During this holiday season, identify someone who is alienated from your family. Pray for him or her.

In the workplace or in school. Reflect upon someone who is dealing with loss or hardship in this joyful season. Find a way to show support.

In the community. Take a family member or friend and give time and energy to one of the many organizations that care for the poor or homeless.



Meditation Moment

A parent attended a confirmation class for a teenage son. It was the fourth Sunday of Advent, so the teacher began the class with the lighting of the Advent wreath. After explaining that the fourth candle stands for Jesus, the teacher asked a boy to light the candle. Next a girl read, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out." Suddenly snickers came from the class as the flame started to go out. The father prayed, "Lord, don't let that flame go out. The symbolism is too important for these young people." All eyes watched as the flame slowly reversed itself and burned brightly.

For reflection . . .

What can I do to make the light of Christ burn more brightly in today's darkness?

WELCOME JESUS AT CHRISTMASTIME,
NOT IN A COLD MANGER OF OUR HEART . . .
BUT WARM WITH LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

MOTHER TERESA

FROM *MISSION* BY MARK LINK, SJ

A Prayer for Mercy

Gracious God, it is difficult to love as you love. You care for everyone you have made, the good and bad alike. When I experience hurt from others, I want to strike back. I do not want to forgive. In this holy season, enlarge my heart. As I accept your mercy, make me merciful to others.
Amen.

Carry this thought in your heart as a guide for your faith journey this week.

But you, our God, are kind and true,
Patient, and ruling all things in mercy.
For even if we sin we are yours . . .

The Book of Wisdom 15:1-2

Profile in Faith

The Book of Wisdom

About one hundred years before Christ's birth, a Jew living in Alexandria composed the Book of Wisdom, which Catholics hold as inspired Scripture. This author draws upon the richness of the Jewish tradition to address the people of his own time. He stresses the universal power and mercy of God.

NIHIL OBSTAT
Rev. Msgr. Robert M. Coerver, Censor Librorum
IMPRIMATUR
† Most Reverend Kevin J. Farrell, DD, Bishop of Dallas
September 29, 2011

The Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur are official declarations that the material reviewed is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those granting the Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions, or statements expressed.

Author: George M. Smiga

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Front: iStockphoto

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition*, copyright 1989, 1993, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 2011 RCL Publishing LLC. All rights reserved.

The Faith Connection® is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and is published weekly by RCL Benziger.

877-275-4725
Contact us at RCLBenziger.com

