

Sermon for Christmas Eve 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

5 p.m. 24 December

Scriptures: Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalter Page 815 (Sung response: **Joy to the world,**

The Lord is come. Psalm 96

Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

Sermon:

The Bible readings for tonight begin with what the scholars generally agree was a poem of gratitude and triumph the people of Israel produced for successfully resisting an invasion of their capitol city of Jerusalem by the neighboring nation of Assyria. Some scholars see it as a part of the coronation of the Judean king, Hezekiah. More likely it celebrated the birth of a new crown prince, who was descended from King David.

In any case, it is an example of a real victory that became a permanent encouragement to the Jewish people. The birth of a baby became a sign of God's activity for God's people, a sign of peace and the reign of justice and righteousness.

The second reading, Psalm 96, is one of several songs the Hebrew people used to remind themselves that their God, Jahweh, had become king. One of the early rabbis pointed out that children were taught to use the word "sing" three times a day to remind themselves that Jahweh was God. Such psalms reminded the people of Israel that "The world stands firm," "human lives are not at the mercy of irrational forces," "not the pawn of some cosmic game between divine beings," "not the object of some supercilious deity." "Even consolation could be found in calamity." "The consequences of these conditions are that heaven and nature should sing and rejoice: the heavens, the earth, the sea, sea creatures, the field, wild animals, and the trees of the forest."

Then the New Testament Letter of Titus uses the coming of Jesus, both his birth and his coming again brings this confidence to reality for all his followers, and he becomes a literal presence of God's grace as we live with and through him.

Last, the Gospel lesson spells out the extremely literal and specific realizing of all this in the birth, in the stable, to a humble couple registering their citizenship, far from home, in ways we have been reminding ourselves right up through this very night.

How can I make this real to you tonight? What is my authority? How do you illustrate this in your life? I fall silent. I'm no authority. If I say, "Trust me," what do you feel?

Let us pray. Dear God, the wonder of faith never ceases. Help us see how human development has brought us to this point, and we're not finished with it. Work with us. Push us forward into greater trust of you. Teach us how to depend on ourselves your way. We do so well with you. This young couple did such a good job with what you gave them. You gave them signs, and they followed, and it made all the difference. Now here we are, in the midst of this good company,

on this holy night, with all these lovely encouragements ... these songs, these lights, these flowers, these kind looks and good words. We know how to be yours. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.