

**ctkAlive! Scripture Study**  
**Nativity of the Lord Jesus**  
**(Midnight Mass)**  
**2022—A Cycle**



**What do I see?**

Study “The Nativity” by Flemish painter Hendrick de Clerck, 17<sup>th</sup> c.

(Source: [artvee.com](http://artvee.com)).

*How does this painting speak to me about welcoming the spirit of the Christ Child into my life and heart?*

**Opening Prayer**

*(edited and abridged for use here)*

Father God,  
thank you for this holy season  
and for the love of those  
gathered with and around me this day  
to celebrate your coming into our lives.

I remain eternally grateful  
for the gift of your son.  
Open my eyes to the many ways  
in which Jesus companions me,  
blessing me each and every day.  
Amen.

Source: [Hallow.com](http://Hallow.com)

**Scripture Readings**

Nativity of the Lord Jesus (Midnight Mass Readings)

The Prophet Isaiah (9: 1-6) “The people who walked in darkness has seen a great light.”

Psalm 96 (1-3, 11-13) “Sing to the Lord a *new* song.”

Paul’s letter to Titus (1: 11-14) “The grace of God has appeared, saving all.”

Luke’s Gospel (2: 1-14) “While they were there (in Bethlehem), the time came for Mary to have her child.”

### Introduction to the Feast of Christmas

So much has been said, written, and sung about the birth of Christ over the past two thousand-plus years. What more can anyone say that someone hasn’t already said? Yet, every preacher—including Christian parents—do their best to find that unspoken or unwritten nugget of original clarity and truth. [Sr. Mary M. McGlone](#), CSJ ([Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet](#)) approaches that clarity and truth:

“In a world in which at least 30 nations are at war, we who flock to the manger are called and empowered to become sacraments [*external signs of internal grace*] of Emmanuel [*God with us*]. Let us wonder at the babe and remember that we must be the body of Christ today. That’s why he came in the first place” ([National Catholic Reporter](#), December 9-22, 2022).

In a mystical—but graspable—sense, Christmas didn’t happen just once two thousand years ago. Our annual commemoration of Christ’s birth makes little sense if we view it as a “one and done” event in human history. Making sense of Christmas this year requires us to believe that this and every Christmas marks a true “coming again” of the Christ child within our own hearts and in the messed-up world we live in. As we sing, “Christ our Savior is born,” let’s each add, “in my heart... in my home... and in my world *this* day.”

### A Reading from the Book of Isaiah (9: 1-6)

The gloom will be dispelled for those who were anxious.  
In earlier times he humiliated the land of Zebulun,  
and the land of Naphtali;  
but now he brings honor to the way of the sea,  
the region beyond the Jordan and Galilee of the nations.  
The people walking in darkness see a bright light;  
light shines on those who live in a land of deep darkness.  
You have enlarged the nation; you give them great joy.  
They rejoice in your presence as harvesters rejoice;  
as warriors celebrate when they divide up the plunder.  
For their oppressive yoke and the club that strikes our shoulders,  
the cudgel the oppressor uses on us,  
you have shattered, as in the day of Midian’s defeat.  
Indeed every boot that marches and shakes the earth  
and every garment dragged through blood is used as fuel for the fire.

But a child is born to us, a son has been given to us.  
He shoulders responsibility and is called:  
Extraordinary Strategist,  
Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace.

### Personal Reflection

This poem by the first Isaiah (the original) dates from around the year 732 BC/BCE. Keep in mind that the “Book of Isaiah” includes writings of at least two other prophets who lived after the Babylonian captivity (5<sup>th</sup> century BC/BCE). In this weekend’s reading, the King of Assyria had already destroyed Israel and taken many Jewish captives to the other end of their empire. They resided in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali (which, centuries later, became Galilee). Dispersed among a society of pagans, they entered into a period of deep-rooted spiritual darkness.

In the Scriptures, many promises appeared as if they might happen immediately. Recall that Yahweh promised Abraham a legitimate son but years passed before the birth of Isaac. The same held true for King David, whose ultimate heir came centuries later with the birth of Christ.

“The people walking in darkness see a bright light; light shines on those who live in a land of deep darkness.”

— *In the darkened world I experience this year, where do I find and see rays of light? In what ways do I strive to let my inner light shine from within me?*

“He shoulders responsibility and is called: Extraordinary Strategist, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

We may recall from other biblical translations into English hearing the term Wonder Counselor or something else.

— *What does the New English Translation’s (NET’s) use of “Extraordinary Strategist” say to me about the newly arrived Messiah’s life and purpose?*

### **Responsorial: Psalm 96 (1-3, 11-13)**

The universal reign of the true God

*Today is born our savior, Christ the Lord!*

Sing to the Lord a new song!  
Sing to the Lord, all the earth!  
Sing to the Lord! Praise his name!  
*Today is born our savior, Christ the Lord!*

Announce every day how he delivers!  
Tell the nations about his splendor!  
Tell all the nations about his amazing deeds!  
*Today is born our savior, Christ the Lord!*

Let the sky rejoice,  
and the earth be happy!  
Let the sea and everything in it shout!  
Let the fields and everything in them celebrate!  
*Today is born our savior, Christ the Lord.*

Then let the trees of the forest shout with joy  
before the Lord, for he comes!  
For he comes to judge the earth!  
He judges the world fairly,  
and the nations in accordance with his justice.  
*Today is born our savior, Christ the Lord!*

### Personal Reflection

The psalmist suggested that we “tell all the nations about [the Messiah’s] amazing deeds!” There’s a lot of singing, rejoicing, and celebrating going on in these verses from Psalm 96. Christmas music surrounds us this week, even in secular settings (shops and malls). Before anything else we bring our praise, our adoration and delighted recognition of God’s presence. We proclaim the glory of our Creator and trust that our meager praise will echo throughout the universe.

If we do this with a sincere heart, Yahweh will accept our gifts of prayer, worship, good deeds, mercy, and kindness. In his love we will forever abide. Praying this psalm, we express our desire and our plea for the reign of God to come to our suffering, war-threatened world.

“Today is born our savior, Christ the Lord!” Psalm 96’s liturgical refrain expresses the true meaning of our annual Christmas celebration.

— *Besides “Merry Christmas,” what other words/phrases do I use to express my understanding of this day’s true meaning?*

— *What personal gift will I bring to the Christ Child’s manger this Christmas?*

— *What “new” song will reside in my heart as I approach the manger when I celebrate the feast of Christmas at Mass or at services I’ll participate in this week?*

### **A Reading from St. Paul’s Letter to Titus (2: 11-14)**

“The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, as we wait for the happy fulfillment of our hope in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good.”

## Personal Reflection

This letter to [Titus](#), one of Paul's early missionary companions, appears to be the *first* of Paul's three [pastoral letters](#) (one to Titus and two to Timothy). It dates from ca. 58 AD/CE. Paul had just written and sent his letter to the struggling Christians in Rome, the center of Roman power. Paul seems to have made up his mind to go west... all the way to Spain, the edge of current geographical knowledge. Traditions in Spain today declare that he [did go there](#). The question depends on whether Paul received an acquittal in his first trial in Rome, then two years later faced another Roman court and a received a sentence of death.

God had a different plan. First, Paul had to face a Roman tribunal. Falling back on his Roman citizenship granted to those born in Tarsus, he exercised his right to be tried in Rome. After several years of captivity in Caesarea in northern Israel, he got what he demanded and set off for Rome, as a captive.

We may wonder how Christians of the First Century celebrated Christmas, if they did at all. From the very beginning it must have varied from place to place with no set date. In Apostolic times, the resurrection of Christ overshadowed all other events of his coming to the world.

"The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people."

— *To what extent does my Christmas celebration focus on Christ's gifting of salvation to all people, when it gets sandwiched among the essential tasks putting up a tree, shopping for gifts, wrapping them, delivering them, receiving them, and cooking a special holiday meal?*

— *How much of my energy remains for church participation to play a major role in the whole of my Christmas celebration?*

— *For me personally, what is my favorite and most meaningful part of our American-style Christmas celebration (be honest)?*

## **The Gospel According to Luke (2: 1-14)**

"Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus to register all the empire for taxes. This was the first registration, taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone went to his own town to be registered.

"So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David. He went to be registered with Mary... 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 strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

"Now there were shepherds nearby living out in the field, keeping guard over their flock at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were absolutely terrified.

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Listen carefully, for I proclaim to you good news that brings great joy to all the people: Today your Savior is born in the

city of David. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.”

“Suddenly a vast, heavenly army appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom he is pleased!’”

### Personal Reflection

At the time of Jesus’ birth, Jews formed a small, mostly powerless nation under the rule of the Roman Emperor, whose domains included a wide mixture of diverse peoples from Spain to Greece. The precision of timing and governorship given by Luke presents a historical difficulty. Why? Because Quirinus did *not* become governor of Syria until after Jesus arrived on earth. As always, several explanations have arisen about infallibility of the Christian writers. Luke had no infallible status as a world historian but only as an early witness to salvation. Not having experienced original apostleship, he gleaned his gospel texts by consulting those closest to Jesus in life, including Mary herself, “Who stored all these things in her heart” (Luke 2: 19).

Jesus’ parents “laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” Luke’s version of the Nativity has Mary and Joseph traveling to Joseph’s tribal hometown, Nazareth, late in her pregnancy. It makes sense that Joseph, a descendant of David, would have had relatives living in Bethlehem. The city teemed with visitors. With every available space already occupied, Joseph may have housed himself and Mary in the animal shelter attached to the home of one of those relatives. (See Brandon Robbins’ You-Tube presentation in the Watch section below.)

The true spirit of the first Christmas saw the promised child present in our midst, with a few unlikely visitors coming to his manger. Shepherds from the hills outside Bethlehem unwittingly became models for those dedicated to contemplation of Christ’s coming. Meanwhile, natives of Bethlehem and out-of-towners of the Davidic line slept the night away unaware of the miraculous events taking place in their town. One thing is sure. With the birth of Jesus a new age in history had dawned.

— *Why did the birth of our Savior arouse so little awareness at the time, with only poor, hard-working shepherds responding to the angelic choir’s invitation? Who else might the angels have invited, but turned down the invitation?*

The angels gave the shepherds no address to look for in Bethlehem. And nearly every home had a stable and a manger. Nor do we hear of a star to guide them to the right house and manger.

— *How might they have found the right stable... the right husband and wife with a newborn?*

Every newborn keeps the great [Mandala](#) of life revolving, adding one generation upon another.

— *How aware am I about my life as a continuing part of the revolving and evolving human race?*



## For Inspirational Watching, Listening, Reading

### Watch

[“10 Things You Didn't Know About Christmas”](#) by [Brandon Robbins](#)

[“10 Words that Will Change the Way You Read Scripture”](#) by [Brandon Robbins](#)

### Listen

[“A Bocelli Family Christmas”](#) featuring especially Andrea, Matteo & Virginia Bocelli (30 min)

[“Mary Did You Know? Gabriel's Message, O Holy Night”](#) sung by [Hayley Westenra](#) (10 min)

[“The Great Mandala”](#) composed by [Peter Yarrow](#) and sung by Yarrow and [Richie Havens](#) (5 min)

*Certainly not a Christmas Carol, but this mid-20<sup>th</sup> c. anti-war song says a lot about the fate of the infant born to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. Lyrics available at [Song Meanings](#).*

### Read

[A Child in Winter: Advent, Christmas and Epiphany with Caryl Houselander](#) by Thomas Hoffman

*The author obtained a degree in liturgical studies from St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. (The book's a bit pricey even on Amazon but well worth it.)*

## Journaling Prompts

Based on this weekend's Scripture readings, what does the Christ Child ask me to do TODAY regarding...

(1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships...  
and

(2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God's love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

*Who needs to receive from me this week a moment of laughter and personal concern?  
Why do I hesitate?*

In light of this weekend's Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

## Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

Feast of Mary, Mother of God

Numbers 6: 22-27 “The Lord bless and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.”

Psalms 67: 2-6, 8 “May God have pity on us and bless us.”

Paul to the Galatians 4: 4-7 “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son,

born of a woman.”

Luke 2: 16-21 “The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem....”

## Closing Prayer

*(adapted and abridged for use here)*

### **The Ordinariness of Christmas**

God of Goodness,

I give you praise for the ordinariness of Christmas...  
a day that that begins the same as any other day.

I give you praise that there is no sign in the heavens...  
no bright star but the light of your presence  
in the ordinary birth of the child.

I give you praise that unobtrusively  
you arrived in the center of human affairs,  
involved in the struggle of life...  
sharing the human experience.

I give you praise that out of compassion  
you take my part and open to me  
a new way of life.  
I pray that... this very day...  
I will see my life's true glory.  
Amen

Source: [Rev. Thomas Caryl Micklem](#), “[Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship](#)”  
found at [Xavier University website](#)

*Gender usage in these reflections: We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.*

The Sunday readings are from the New English Translation (NET)  
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