



Celebrate

First Sunday of Christmas
December 28, 2025

As we celebrate the Twelve Days of Christmas, our gospel today confronts us with the death of innocent children at the hands of Herod. The birth of Christ does not remove the power of evil from our world, but its light gives us hope as we walk with all the "holy innocents" of past generations and today who have suffered unjustly. In our gathering around word and meal, God continues to redeem us, lift us up, and carry us as in days of old.

Prayer of the Day

O Lord God, you know that we cannot place our trust in our own powers. As you protected the infant Jesus, so defend us and all the needy from harm and adversity, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading

Isaiah 63:7-9

God does not delegate divine intervention to a messenger or an angel. God's own presence brings salvation. The prophet and all who read these words join in celebrating God's gracious deeds. God trusts that God's people will not act falsely.

I will recount the gracious deeds of the
LORD,
the praiseworthy acts of the LORD,
because of all that the LORD has done
for us
and the great favor to the house of
Israel
that he has shown them according to
his mercy,
according to the abundance of his
steadfast love.

⁸For he said, "Surely they are my people,
children who will not act
deceitfully,"
and he became their savior
⁹in all their distress.
It was no messenger or angel
but his presence that saved them;
in his love and pity it was he who
redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them
all the days of old.



Hallelujah! Praise the LORD ¹ from the heavens;
praise God ¹ in the heights.

²Praise the LORD, ¹ all you angels;
sing praise, all you ¹ hosts of heaven.

³Praise the LORD, ¹ sun and moon;
sing praise, all you ¹ shining stars.

⁴Praise the LORD, heav- ¹ en of heavens,
and you waters a- ¹ bove the heavens.

⁵Let them praise the name ¹ of the LORD,
who commanded, and they ¹ were created,

⁶who made them stand fast forev- ¹ er and ever,
giving them a law that shall not ¹ pass away. **R**

⁷Praise the LORD ¹ from the earth,
you sea monsters ¹ and all deeps;

⁸fire and hail, ¹ snow and fog,
tempestuous wind, do- ¹ ing God's will;

⁹mountains ¹ and all hills,
fruit trees ¹ and all cedars;

¹⁰wild beasts ¹ and all cattle,
creeping things and ¹ flying birds;

¹¹sovereigns of the earth ¹ and all peoples,
princes and all rulers ¹ of the world;

¹²young ¹ men and maidens,
old and ¹ young together. **R**

¹³Let them praise the name ¹ of the LORD,
whose name only is exalted, whose splendor is over ¹ earth and heaven.

¹⁴The LORD has raised up strength for the people
and praise for all ¹ faithful servants,
the children of Israel, a people who are near the LORD.
¹ Hallelujah! **R**

Through Jesus' suffering and death, the trail to eternal salvation has been blazed for us. We do not fear death, because he has conquered the power of death. Thus Christ, our merciful and faithful high priest, has the final say over the destiny of our lives.

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹²saying,

"I will proclaim your name to my
brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation
I will praise you."

¹³And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again,

"Here am I and the children whom
God has given me."

¹⁴Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. ¹⁶For it is clear that he did not come to help angels but the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Gospel

Matthew 2:13-23

In a dream, Joseph is warned to flee to Egypt to protect the infant Jesus from the jealousy of Herod.

Now after [the magi] had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. ¹⁷Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸"A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled,
because they are no more."

¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰"Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazarene."

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Empowered by the news of Christ's birth, let us pray boldly for the church, creation, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

God of grace, you show us mercy not according to our worthiness, but according to the abundance of your steadfast love. Grant us the courage to go into the world and do likewise. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

God of abundance, the sun and moon praise you and the shining stars sing of your love. Where we have desecrated your creation, make us into a healing balm for what we have broken. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

God of righteousness, when leaders fail to fulfill their calls to enact justice, you suffer alongside us. Propel those in power to see you reflected in the faces of all they serve. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

God of life, you claim us as your own and care for us as Christ's siblings. Pour out your compassion in every place your people suffer, and protect them in the palm of your hand. (*We pray especially for . . .*) Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

God of compassion, you nurture children as the apple of your eye. As you sheltered your son Jesus from Herod's grasp, shelter all children in danger. As you comforted Rachel, comfort all who have lost children to violence. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God of love, you console those who weep for lost beloved ones (*especially*). Even as we mourn, we offer thanks for those who have gone before us, trusting in your comfort and protection. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

With the joy of Christ's birth in our hearts, we commend our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your boundless mercy and eternal love; through Jesus Christ our Savior.
Amen.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday (The Holy Innocents, Martyrs [transferred]) 1 Peter 4:12-19. **Tuesday** 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. **Wednesday** 1 Kings 3:5-14. **Thursday** (Name of Jesus) Philippians 2:5-11. **Friday** (commemoration of Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe, renewer of the church, died 1872) Hebrews 11:1-12. **Saturday** Psalm 72. **Second Sunday of Christmas** Jeremiah 31:7-14 or Sirach 24:1-12; Psalm 147:12-20 or Wisdom 10:15-21; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:[1-9] 10-18.

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