

First Sunday of Advent (Cycle C)

First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

The prophet Jeremiah lived at a difficult time in Jewish history. Jerusalem, their beloved capitol, had been destroyed, and most of the people taken captive to far-off Babylon, which is in present-day Iraq. Despite this gloomy setting, Jeremiah expresses the conviction that the Lord will raise up a new leader from the line of David to restore and rebuild their native land.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

The date was some 30 years after Christ's death and resurrection. The place was a city in northeast Greece called Thessalonica, where Christians were being persecuted. Paul, who had brought the Gospel there, heard about their perseverance and sent a letter of encouragement.

Second Sunday of Advent (Cycle C)

First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9

The setting for today's reading is the time when the Jews were captives in Babylon. The author writes of a bright future when they will return with joy to their homeland. In this passage, Jerusalem is pictured as a joyful mother, watching her children come home.

Second Reading: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

Of all the communities Paul founded, the one at Philippi was especially dear to him. Wherever he was, they sent him moral and financial support to help carry on his work. Now confined to a prison cell, Paul writes to them like a proud parent.

Third Sunday of Advent (Cycle C)

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-18

The days of the prophet Zephaniah were bad times for Israel because of their idolatry and unfaithfulness to the law. Zephaniah preached impending judgment, a day of doom. But in the end, he tells them of a day when they will sing for joy, and the Lord will sing joyfully over them.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

Of all the communities founded by Paul, the one at Philippi was his favorite. Toward the end of his letter to them, he advises them how to live as they await Christ's return in glory.

Fourth Sunday of Advent (Cycle C)

First Reading: Micah 5:1-4

The prophet Micah, writing some 700 years before Christ, attacked the social injustices of Israel. He looked ahead to a day when the tiny city of Bethlehem, where David had been born, would bring forth a new shepherd — a good shepherd — who would unify the people and bring peace.

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

The Letter to the Hebrews constantly looks to the Old Testament and shows how Jesus surpassed its laws and sacrifices. In Old Testament times, the people offered animal sacrifices over and over in atonement for their sins. But this could not compare to the God-made-flesh who gave his life *once* for the sins of all.

Christmas at Midnight Mass (Cycle C)

First Reading: Isaiah 9: 1-6

The prophet Isaiah lived 750 years before Christ. In his time, the northern Jewish Kingdom of Israel was laid waste by the armies of Assyria. Today's passage offers the conquered people hope for a glorious future under a wonderful king. Christians have seen Jesus as fulfilling this prophecy.

Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

The letter to Titus was written about 30 years after Paul's death, and was written in Paul's name, a practice common in the ancient world. Titus was a traveling companion of Paul, and later was in charge of a Christian community on the island of Crete.

Feast of the Holy Family (Cycle C)

First Reading: 1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28

Today's reading takes place 11 centuries before Christ at an Israelite shrine, which is referred to as a "temple" in the text. When Hannah, who was childless, visited this shrine previously, Eli the high priest had promised that she would bear a son. Today's reading picks up from there. (Christians have seen Hannah as a symbol of Mary.)

Second Reading: 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

The first letter of John was written for the community whose leader produced the fourth Gospel. Today's passage describes in very familiar and understandable terms our close relationship with God.

Octave of Christmas: Mary Mother of God (Cycle C)

First Reading: Numbers 6:22-27

The fourth book of the Bible is called the Book of Numbers simply because in describing the wanderings of the people in the Sinai Desert, it gives two census reports. In this section, we hear how God instructed the priestly leaders to bless the people.

Second Reading: Galatians 4:4-7

Galatia was a Roman province in what is now central Turkey. Paul had visited there and founded a Christian community. In this section of his letter to them, he explains that all people, not just a select few, are called to be sons and daughters of God.

Epiphany (Cycle C)

First Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

The last part of the book of Isaiah contains the words of a prophet who lived after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon (which is modern-day Iraq). They found their temple destroyed and the city leveled. But with great faith the prophet envisions a wonderful future for Jerusalem.

Second Reading: Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

The Ephesians were a community in which Jewish converts to Christianity lived side-by-side with Gentile converts. The author of this letter confirms that God's saving grace is available to everyone, whatever their background.