

Lectionary Texts for December 24, 2023 • *Christmas Eve* - Year B
Isaiah 9:2-7 • Psalm 96 • Titus 2:11-14 • Luke 2:1-20



Luke 2:1-20

Journey to Bethlehem - Detail from *The Portinari Triptych*, ca 1475, by Hugo van der Goes,
Flemish, ca 1435-1482

Oil on wood

Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

Continued

This detail is at the top of the left panel of *The Portinari Triptych*, also known as *The Portinari Altarpiece*. (See page 4.) The detail shows Joseph tenderly helping Mary down the rocky hillside with a donkey and ox following. It is the beginning of the story shown on the panels of the altarpiece, with the center panel showing the Shepherds worshipping the new-born child, lying on the ground.

Hugo van der Goes, born in Ghent or nearby in the 1430s, became a master in the painters' guild of Ghent in 1467. He soon began receiving commissions from the cities of Ghent and Bruges for various works and decorations. In 1470 he became the leading painter in Ghent and was repeatedly elected as deacon of the painters' guild of Ghent.

The altarpiece was commissioned for a church located inside a large hospital in Florence by the Italian banker Tommaso Portinari, a descendent of the hospital's founder. For more than 40 years Portinari was a representative for the Medici family's bank in Bruges where he became acquainted with van der Goes. Portinari is depicted in the left panel and his wife is in the right panel, such depictions being common in large (central panel is 8'-4" x 10'-0") commissioned works. The altarpiece arrived in Florence in 1483 and was greatly admired by the Italian artists who saw it.

— Art curated and narrative provided by Norman Mahan
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Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Psalm 96

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.
Say among the nations, “The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.”
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and 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 bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



The Portinari Triptych,