

## Readings for December 7, 2008

### FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 40:1–11

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup>A voice cries out:  
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

<sup>6</sup>A voice says, "Cry out!"  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"  
All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

<sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

<sup>9</sup>Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup>See, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

<sup>11</sup>He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.

## **PSALM: Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13**

You have been gracious to your land, O LORD,  
you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.

**<sup>2</sup>You have forgiven the iniquity of your people  
and blotted out all their sins.**

<sup>8</sup>I will listen to what the LORD God is saying,  
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people  
and to those who turn their hearts to him.

**<sup>9</sup>Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.**

<sup>10</sup>Mercy and truth have met together;  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

**<sup>11</sup>Truth shall spring up from the earth,  
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.**

<sup>12</sup>The LORD will indeed grant prosperity,  
and our land will yield its increase.

**<sup>13</sup>Righteousness shall go before him,  
and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.**

## **SECOND LESSON: 2 Peter 3:8–15a**

<sup>8</sup>But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

<sup>11</sup>Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup>waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? <sup>13</sup>But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; <sup>15</sup>and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

## **GOSPEL: Mark 1:1–8**

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,  
"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

<sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight,"'

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

## Readings for December 14, 2008

### FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
<sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion —  
to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.  
<sup>4</sup>They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.  
<sup>8</sup>For I the LORD love justice,  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;  
I will faithfully give them their recompense,  
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.  
<sup>9</sup>Their descendants shall be known among the nations,  
and their offspring among the peoples;  
all who see them shall acknowledge  
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.  
<sup>10</sup>I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,  
my whole being shall exult in my God;

for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

<sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth its shoots,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,  
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

### **PSALM: Psalm 126**

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,  
then were we like those who dream.

**<sup>2</sup>Then was our mouth filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy.**

<sup>3</sup>Then they said among the nations,  
"The LORD has done great things for them."

**<sup>4</sup>The LORD has done great things for us,  
and we are glad indeed.**

<sup>5</sup>Restore our fortunes, O LORD,  
like the watercourses of the Negev.

**<sup>6</sup>Those who sowed with tears  
will reap with songs of joy.**

<sup>7</sup>Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed,  
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

### **SECOND LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24**

<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances; for  
this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup>Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Do not  
despise the words of prophets, <sup>21</sup>but test everything; hold fast to what is good;  
<sup>22</sup>abstain from every form of evil.

<sup>23</sup>May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit  
and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus  
Christ. <sup>24</sup>The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

### **GOSPEL: John 1:6–8, 19–28**

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a  
witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself  
was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>19</sup>This is the testimony given  
by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him,  
"Who are you?" <sup>20</sup>He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the  
Messiah." <sup>21</sup>And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am  
not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." <sup>22</sup>Then they said to him, "Who  
are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about

yourself?" <sup>23</sup>He said,

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,

"Make straight the way of the Lord,"

as the prophet Isaiah said.

<sup>24</sup>Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup>They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" <sup>26</sup>John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup>the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." <sup>28</sup>This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

## Readings for December 21, 2008

### FIRST LESSON: 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, <sup>2</sup>the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." <sup>3</sup>Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

<sup>4</sup>But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: <sup>5</sup>Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? <sup>6</sup>I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. <sup>7</sup>Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" <sup>8</sup>Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; <sup>9</sup>and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup>And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup>from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>16</sup>Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

### PSALM: Luke 1:47–55

My soul magnifies the LORD,

<sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup>**for he has looked with favor**

**on the lowliness of his servant.**

Surely, from now on all generations

will call me blessed;

**<sup>49</sup>for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.**

<sup>50</sup>His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

**<sup>51</sup>He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.**

<sup>52</sup>He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

**<sup>53</sup>he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.**

<sup>54</sup>He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

**<sup>55</sup>according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.**

## **SECOND LESSON: Romans 16:25–27**

<sup>25</sup>Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup>but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — <sup>27</sup>to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

## **GOSPEL: Luke 1:26–38**

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

## Readings for December 28, 2008

### FIRST LESSON: Jeremiah 31:15–17

<sup>15</sup>Thus says the LORD:

A voice is heard in Ramah,  
lamentation and bitter weeping.  
Rachel is weeping for her children;  
she refuses to be comforted for her children,  
because they are no more.

<sup>16</sup>Thus says the LORD:

Keep your voice from weeping,  
and your eyes from tears;  
for there is a reward for your work,

says the LORD:

they shall come back from the land of the enemy;

<sup>17</sup>there is hope for your future,

says the LORD:

your children shall come back to their own country.

### PSALM: Psalm 124

If the LORD had not been on our side,  
let Israel now say;

**<sup>2</sup>if the LORD had not been on our side,  
when enemies rose up against us,**

<sup>3</sup>then would they have swallowed us up alive  
in their fierce anger toward us;

**<sup>4</sup>then would the waters have overwhelmed us  
and the torrent gone over us;**

<sup>5</sup>then would the raging waters  
have gone right over us.

**<sup>6</sup>Blessed be the LORD!**

**He has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.**

<sup>7</sup>We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler;  
the snare is broken, and we have escaped.

**<sup>8</sup>Our help is in the name of the LORD,  
the maker of heaven and earth.**

### SECOND LESSON: 1 Peter 4:12–19

<sup>12</sup>Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup>If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is

resting on you. <sup>15</sup>But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. <sup>16</sup>Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name. <sup>17</sup>For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

<sup>18</sup>And

"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,  
what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?"

<sup>19</sup>Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

### **GOSPEL: Matthew 2:13–18**

<sup>13</sup>Now after they 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."

<sup>14</sup>Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, <sup>15</sup>and 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."

<sup>16</sup>When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, 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 wise men. <sup>17</sup>Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup>"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."