

Fourth Sunday in Advent December 18, 2016

LUTHERAN

## LIVING THE ^ LECTIONARY

*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.  
An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the rhythms  
of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.*

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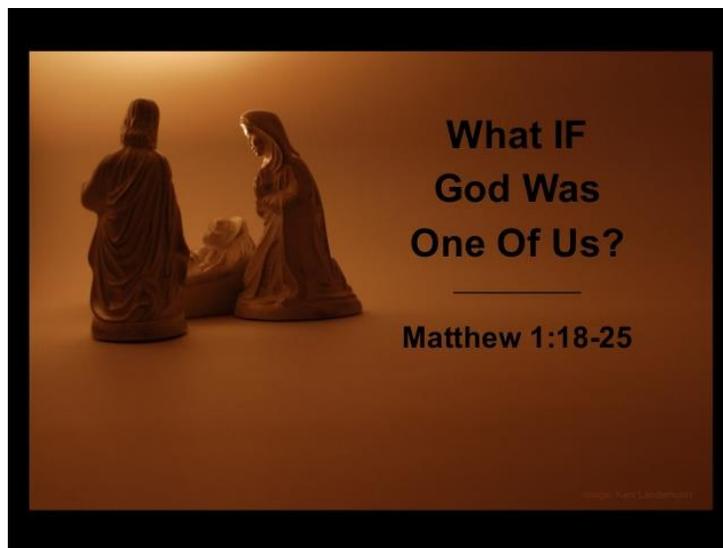
**through Facebook at either “Living the Lutheran Lectionary”,  
“Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Parma” or “Harold Weseloh”**

December 15, 2016 (Thursdays at 10:00 AM)

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 7500 State Road, Parma, OH

*(Presented as a part of the bible study/worship midweek service (currently on Fridays at 7:00pm) in a house church setting,  
a newly formed assisted living site and used by Lutherans in Africa.*

*E-mail [puritaspastor@hotmail.com](mailto:puritaspastor@hotmail.com) for details.*



<http://www.slideshare.net/fergie4/what-if-god-was-one-of-us-matthew-11825>

### Hymn of the Day

**Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 357 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 62**

“O come, O come, Emmanuel”, “Oh come” in TLH

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q\\_Q-4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q_Q-4) “12th century Latin hymn, English text with lyrics performed by a traditional choir.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO7ySn-Swwc> An instrumental version worth the 5.33 minutes.  
The Piano Guys

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K50n\\_YT81A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K50n_YT81A) "From Glad's 1994 "An Acapella Christmas" album, produced by Benson Records

For a rather detailed history of this hymn visit

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O\\_come,\\_O\\_come,\\_Emmanuel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O_come,_O_come,_Emmanuel)

The Holy Bible, [English Standard Version \(ESV\)](#) Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

**Isaiah 7:10-17; RCL (Revised Common Lectionary), verses 10-16 (Next Week: *Christmas Day*; Isaiah 52: 7-10; RCL the same verses) The first reading will be from Isaiah through January 22.**

*"The difficulty of today's text is perhaps also its genius: God is with us-and the consequences are altogether ambiguous. Properly understood, is that not the ambiguity of Advent itself? God is coming: Rejoice! Or, God is coming: Beware!"*

*Both responses are appropriate and true, and both mark the observance of Advent. God is coming, says Isaiah in our series of Advent readings, bringing a kingdom of peace and prosperity, equality and justice, where all creation joins humanity's voice in songs of praise. Rejoice! But, God is coming, says John the Baptist: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matthew 3:7).*

*God is coming, and we don't know whether to laugh or cry. Are we eager to meet God? Of course! Are we ready to meet God? Never! A healthy tension between the two will be the hallmark of an Advent that pays attention to the biblical texts..."*

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=13](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=13) [Fred Gaiser](#) Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

<sup>10</sup> Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, <sup>11</sup> "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

<sup>12</sup> But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."

<sup>13</sup> Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you<sup>[a]</sup> a sign: The virgin<sup>[b]</sup> will conceive and give birth to a son, and<sup>[c]</sup> will call him Immanuel.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>15</sup> He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, <sup>16</sup> for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. <sup>17</sup> The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria."

a. [Isaiah 7:14](#) The Hebrew is plural.

b. <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/BbtEYUmirBE/maxresdefault.jpg>[Isaiah 7:14](#) Masoretic Text; Dead Sea Scrolls *son, and he or son, and they*

c. [Isaiah 7:14](#) *Immanuel* means *God with us*.

"Today's reading is probably one of the best known passages in the Old Testament. It is associated in our lectionary with Matt 1:18-25, Matthew's story of the birth of Jesus. The latter quotes Isa 7:14 (Matt 1:23) which suggests that the Matthew passage is a fulfilment of the Isaiah text. That was certainly the understanding of the writer of the Gospel, and Christian tradition has long associated the two passages. However, to understand their relationship simply in terms of a 'prediction' and its 'fulfilment' is to devalue the Isaiah text and to misunderstand the Gospel. There are many things to be explored here about what waiting for the Lord to be 'with us' implies.

First, a word about the relation between the passages. This hinges on the identity of the 'young woman' (Isa 7:14). There is ambiguity in the meaning of the Hebrew word *almah*, although many would say that the word seems neutral in relation to the sexual experience of the woman. The word is translated in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) by *parthenos*, and in the Latin Vulgate by *virgo*. While these words in their ancient contexts do not necessarily mean 'virgin' in our strict sense, that is the way the writer of Matthew has understood the Septuagint, from which he quotes Isaiah. The Isaiah passage shows very little interest in the woman or by whom she becomes pregnant. It is interested in the child as a sign for something else. Matthew's Gospel, on the other hand, cites Isa 7:14 as a prophecy about Christ seen against the Hellenistic idea of a divine pregnancy which, without the presence of a human father, points to the child as a divine gift. It is in this context that the virginity of Mary is emphasized.

Second, because Isaiah has little interest in the woman, her identity and that of the child remain unclear. Scholars have made many suggestions. The young woman could be a royal wife, soon to have a child to king Ahaz, or she might be an unknown queen of the distant future whose son will exercise kingship in a faithful way. She could be the prophet's wife and the child will bear a name that is a sign of the prophet's message, like his other two children (7:3; 8:3). Others have suggested that the woman, who is clearly pregnant, might just be an unknown bystander listening to the conversation between the prophet and king in Isaiah 7. The sign then has nothing to do with identity, but everything to do with timing. There are arguments for and against each of these suggestions. The vagaries of Isaiah 7 are part of the story. Some might want to resolve them by treating the passage as a 'prediction' clarified by the Gospel story. But in that case the 'prediction' soon outlives its usefulness. On the other hand, it can be instructive to keep the Isaiah reading, with all its uncertainties alongside the 'fulfilment' in Matthew 1. They 'speak' to each other and deepen our understanding of the Gospel.

The lack of identity for the woman or the child in Isa 7:14 sharpens the clear identity given to the child in Matthew 1. In the Gospel story Mary and Joseph are named, and information is even given on their characters. Joseph is further identified by his genealogy (Matt 1:2-16). We know who this mother and baby are with whom Matthew associates Isaiah's prophecy. But even so, this identity is a surprise. Even modern scholars, with all the benefit of hindsight, and many with the benefit of Christian faith, limit their suggestions for the identities of the characters in Isa 7:14 to royal wives with newborn princes, or the wife and child of the prophet. The child who is the sign is assumed to be associated with power and prestige, be it social or religious. But not so Matthew's promised child. In spite of the lengthy and noble genealogy of Joseph, and even the observations of the eastern kings (Matt 2:1-2), this young woman and child remain in obscurity, so much so that they evade the detection of Herod's best secret service agents (Matt 2:16). The one whose name is Immanuel, 'God with us', is one whose presence will be known only in his ministry, death and resurrection. God is 'with us' in this one in totally unexpected ways, redefining power and prestige, and upsetting our most carefully planned and detailed expectations.

Finally, there are other complexities to Isa 7:10-16 that inform our interpretation of both Isaiah 7 and Matthew 1. In Isa 7:10-12, why does not king Ahaz, who is troubled by threats of attack from nations to the north, ask for a sign from God as to what to do? Is the prophet's oracle in v. 14 an encouragement urging trust from the king who fears what that will cost him, or does it counter a decision the king has already made which he knows neither the prophet nor God will condone? Moreover, the oracle in vv. 14-15 and its interpretation in v. 16 give the oracle a positive twist. Before this child grows very old, the threat from the north will dissipate. But as we read v. 17 (not included in our reading for today but which rightly concludes the passage), we get a different picture. The threatening nations to the north will be overcome by Assyria, with whom Ahaz is thinking of making an alliance. But this will also inevitably bring trouble for Ahaz and Judah (Isa 10:5-11). The sign of

Immanuel, 'God with us', is ambiguous. Is God with us to deliver us or to judge us? Some passages appended to today's reading, namely vv. 18-20 and 23-25, say the latter. On the other hand, vv. 21-22 have a more positive outlook. It seems the editors of Isaiah deliberately maintained the ambiguity of the sign God insisted on giving Ahaz. Is God 'with us' for deliverance or destruction, salvation or judgment? Can we separate the two?

Reading Matthew 1 in light of Isa 7:10-17 with all its ambiguity, casts the story of the baby Jesus into a different light. Is God with us in Jesus for salvation or judgment or both? Maybe the only real hope for our world is to know God's condemnation in Jesus of the conflict, hatred and injustice that fractures this world, a world which we also know in Jesus God loves dearly.

<http://hwallace.unitingchurch.org.au/WebOTcomments/AdventA/Advent4Isa7.html> The Rev'd Dr. Howard Wallace, ...Minister in the Uniting Church in Australia and formerly Professor of Old Testament in the Centre for Theology and Ministry, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

### **Psalm 24; RCL, Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 (Psalm 2; RCL Psalm 98)**

*"Psalm 24 is notoriously difficult to interpret.*

*While virtually everyone sees that it falls into three parts: vv. 1-2; vv. 3-6; and vv. 7-10, their disparate nature renders most attempts to explain their interrelationship conjectural at best and speculative at worst. Oh well ... here goes!..." (continued after the reading)*

#### **The King of Glory A Psalm of David.**

24 The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,<sup>[a]</sup>

the world and those who dwell therein,

<sup>2</sup> for he has founded it upon the seas  
and established it upon the rivers.

<sup>3</sup> Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?

<sup>4</sup> He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not lift up his soul to what is false  
and does not swear deceitfully.

<sup>5</sup> He will receive blessing from the LORD  
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

<sup>6</sup> Such is the generation of those who seek him,  
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.<sup>[b]</sup> **Selah**

<sup>7</sup> Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.

<sup>8</sup> Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD, strong and mighty,  
the LORD, mighty in battle!

<sup>9</sup> Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And lift them up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.

<sup>10</sup> Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD of hosts,  
he is the King of glory! **Selah**

a. [Psalm 24:1](#) Or *and all that fills it*

b. [Psalm 24:6](#) Septuagint, Syriac, and two Hebrew manuscripts; Masoretic Text *who seek your face, Jacob*

“...By far the most common approach to Psalm 24 sees it as a liturgy that sketches the return of the Ark of the Lord. This return may be identified with an actual battle; David’s bringing the Ark to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:13-19; 1 Chronicles 15:25-16:3); Solomon’s completion of the Temple construction (1 Kings 8:1-11; 2 Chronicles 5); part of the pre-exilic Feast of Tabernacles; or the post-exilic Babylonian Akitu Festival marking the advent of the New Year. Since Israel did bring the Ark into battle and enjoyed military success as a result (1 Samuel 4), one assumes it would also have been brought back and that its return would likely be celebrated. Creation and divine kingship are constitutive of other ancient Near Eastern processions and these are clearly present in verses 1-2 and 7-10. The holy mountain and the sanctuary appear in verse 3. Verse 6 uses vocabulary found in pilgrimage texts. Verses 7–10 mention God’s glory five times, and many passages locate God’s glory in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple or in the tabernacle that preceded it (Exodus 40:34-38). In addition, each of the three sections is assigned its own setting: Verses 1-2 as pilgrims approached Jerusalem; vv. 3-6 at the city’s gates; and vv. 7-10 at the actual ceremony.

Obviously, much of this reconstruction is conjectural, presuming a number of rituals and ceremonies of which we have no record, especially verses 3-6, usually construed as a “test” for admission to the Temple. But the qualities addressed by this test are moral, while admittance to the Temple was denied only for physical reasons.

Recent work on the psalm, provides a measure of encouragement for this reading. First of all, there is a growing consensus that Psalm 24 is an entrance liturgy due its placement in a series of psalms displaying a concentric structure: (Psalms 15 – 24)...”

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2657](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2657) **Mark Throntveit**, Elva B. Lovell Professor of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

**Listen to verses 7-10 as presented in Handel’s Messiah;**

**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA6\\_cmOA070](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA6_cmOA070) The Messiah is sung frequently at Christmas time. You can listen to an entire concert, with an introduction at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuGSOkYWfDQ>**

**Romans 1:1-7; RCL, same reading (Hebrews 1:1-6 (7-12); RCL, verses 1-4 (5-12)**

*“This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian’s while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes...To begin with, we have to become familiar with the vocabulary of the letter and know what St. Paul means by the words law, sin, grace, faith, justice, flesh, spirit, etc. Otherwise there is no use in reading it.*

. <http://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=luth&b=45&c=1> Martin Luther

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—<sup>2</sup> the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures<sup>3</sup> regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life<sup>[a]</sup> was a descendant of David,<sup>4</sup> and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power<sup>[b]</sup> by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>5</sup> Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from<sup>[c]</sup> faith for his name’s sake.<sup>6</sup> And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup> To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

- a. [Romans 1:3](#) Or *who according to the flesh*
- b. [Romans 1:4](#) Or *was declared with power to be the Son of God*
- c. [Romans 1:5](#) Or *that is*

“The opening of the letter to the Romans contains, in seven tightly packed verses, a summary of the themes that will be discussed in the rest of the letter.

It describes who Paul is and how he gets his authority. It presents the content of the gospel and its implications for Paul’s addressees, and it describes who these addressees are.

The first seven verses of the epistle are as good an introduction as any to some of the main elements of Paul’s thought. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben even goes as far as to say that the first verse of the epistle contains the letter as a whole: “... each word of the *incipit* contracts within itself the complete text of the Letter, in a *vertiginous recapitulation*...”

In an extremely dense paragraph, Paul has established the key identity of the Christ-believers: slaves of Christ. He has shown the connection of the good news about Jesus with the Jewish Scriptures and has put into place a relation of mutual obligation and respect with a community he does not know. They are all children of God, and Paul counts on this kinship to build a community that will receive him with hospitality and support him in his missionary efforts towards Spain.

[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1895](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1895) [Valerie Nicolet-Anderson](#) Maître de Conférence (Assistant Professor, , Faculté Libre de Théologie Protestante, Paris

Extra points if you know what “incipit”, “vertiginous” and “recapitulation” mean without having to look them up. See page 10 if you need help.

## “The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 1st Chapter” “Glory to You, O Lord”

**Matthew 1:18-25; RCL, same reading (John 1:1-14 (15-18); RCL, verse 1-14)**

*“This lection is, of course, one of the prime passages used and preached on during the Christmas season. The challenge is to say something fresh but yet familiar and reassuring about it.*

*An important exegetical perspective that needs to be kept in mind is the **Matthean**\* text tells the story more from the angle of Joseph's perspective, while the Lukan birth narrative tells the tale from the perspective of how things affected and were seen by Mary. What the two narratives have in common is interesting: 1) a birth in Bethlehem, even though the family is from Nazareth and Jesus would be called Jesus of Nazareth; 2) a virginal conception; 3) a pregnancy during the engagement period caused through the agency of the Holy Spirit; and 4) Joseph resolves to accept Jesus into his life and family, as is shown by subsequent events...” (continued after reading)*

### **Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son**

<sup>18</sup>This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about<sup>[a]</sup>: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet<sup>[b]</sup> did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup>But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,<sup>[c]</sup> because he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”<sup>[d]</sup> (which means “God with us”).

<sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup>But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

1. [Matthew 1:18](#) Or *The origin of Jesus the Messiah was like this*
2. [Matthew 1:19](#) Or *was a righteous man and*
3. [Matthew 1:21](#) *Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means the Lord saves.*
4. [Matthew 1:23](#) Isaiah 7:14

## “This is the Gospel of the Lord”

## “Praise to You, O Christ”

“...Though it has become fashionable in some scholarly circles to suggest the story of the miraculous conception of Jesus has analogies with the stories about the births of Emperors or Kings, in fact this is not really accurate. A story about a god coming down and raping a human woman is of a very different ilk than the story of a miraculous virginal conception through the power of the Holy Spirit, not through any sort of intercourse.

Furthermore, the story in Isaiah 6 about a virgin conceiving, while compatible with our story in Matthew 1, does not in fact specify a virginal conception. It simply says a nubile woman of marriageable age, who was indeed a virgin, would conceive and give birth to a child. Unlike Matthew 1, that text does not specify the *means* by which the virgin is impregnated, and all indications are that early Jewish were not looking for, nor did they think, Isaiah 6 predicted a miraculous conception.

This explains the shocked reaction of both Joseph in Matthew 1 and Mary in the *Lukan\** account. The assumption a Torah-true Jew like Joseph must have made is Mary got pregnant in the usual manner, hence his decision to divorce her quietly. It took further divine intervention in the form of a dream to head off that disaster, and the disgracing and shaming (not to mention the potential stoning) of Mary. In short, the potential scandal in this story, and the lack of a clear prediction of a virginal conception in Isaiah 6 or parallel in other birth narratives, means this story arose from an historical incident in the life of Mary and Joseph, and then was explained with the aid of the text of Isaiah 6. The First Evangelist uses Isaiah to provide proof that this surprising and unprecedented event was, in fact, a fulfillment of Scripture and all along a part of God's plan for human redemption.

Some background information about early Jewish marriages helps the exposition of this text. In the first place, engagement in this culture was a formal contractual matter, usually decided on by the two fathers in question (i.e. it was an arranged marriage), and was, in fact, the first stage of the marriage itself, to be complete some months hence by the formal wedding ceremony. The reason Matthew says that Joseph had resolved to "divorce" a woman he was only engaged to, is because engagement then was a legally binding contract, unlike engagement in the West today.

Secondly, we need to understand in that patriarchal culture, the birth of the first born son was all important and crucial to the family line and property transfer. The fact Joseph is prepared to give up the right to sire his own first born son and accept and even name Jesus (Yeshua/Joshua means "Yahweh saves") says a lot about the character of Joseph. It leads to the oddest genealogy ever in Matthew 1:1-17 in which Jesus is shoehorned into Joseph's genealogy by putting Mary into that genealogy despite the fact that it is a patrilineal genealogy (x begat y...).

This is a narrative of surprising and unexpected events and suggests a God of unexpected actions. Finally, Matthew 1:25 is a crucial conclusion to our passage and suggests Mary and Joseph did not have marital relations until after the birth and naming of Jesus. The stories thereafter (see e.g. Mark 3:21-35 and Mark 6 and the parallels in Matthew) suggest Mary and Joseph, being good early Jews, went on to have numerous children, both boys and girls the natural way who are rightly called Jesus' brothers and sisters. In short, Matthew's Gospel affirms the virginal conception of Mary, but not her perpetual virginity, or for that matter her own immaculate conception by her mother. Those ideas are found only in much later Catholic traditions.”

[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=779](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=779) [Ben Witherington](#) Amos  
Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky

\*\*Last week we had Matthew as an adjective, this week we add Luke as an adjective.



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<http://fineartamerica.com/featured/a-modern-nativity-scene-julie-rodriguez-jones.html>

**Christmas is coming – and so are the multiple readings. Here is the complete list of readings for the Lutheran lectionary.**

**Dec. 24, The Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas Eve)**

Is. 7:10–14, Psalm 110:1–4, 1 John 4:7–16, Matt. 1:18–25'

**Dec. 24, The Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas Midnight)**

Is. 9:2–7, Psalm 96, Titus 2:11–14, Luke 2:1–14, (15–20),

**Dec. 25 The Nativity of Our Lord**

Is. 52:7–10, Psalm 2, Heb.1:1–6, (7–12), John 1:1–14, (15–18)

The Revised Common Lectionary has a greater variety of readings which can be found at

<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/lections.php?year=A&season=Christmas>

incipit - The opening of a manuscript, early printed book, or chanted liturgical text.

vertiginous - Extremely high or steep

recapitulation - An act or instance of summarizing and restating the main points of something

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition>