

THE EMMAUS SERIES

Christmas Year A B C

Midnight Isaiah 9:1-7 Titus: 11-14 Luke 2: 1-14	Dawn Isaiah 62:11-12 Titus 3:4-7 Luke 2:15-20	During the day Isaiah 52: 7-10 Hebrews 1:1-6 John 1:1-18
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God's saving power has been revealed – salvation for the whole human race

Despite the fact that many of the themes of Christian faith are fading, Luke's gospel account of the Saviour's birth resonates in the awareness of most Australians – the Child in the manger, the shepherds and the angels' song of "Peace on earth". We believers are challenged to own what the story has to tell a struggling world - beyond commercial trivialisation and the sentimental attractiveness of a new born babe.

The second readings of the liturgies of Christmas Day point beyond these superficialities, inviting us to share in the wonder and joy brought by the Saviour's birth: the dawn of salvation for the whole world! "God's grace (saving power) has been revealed" bringing "salvation for the whole human race"; "in these last days God has spoken through his Son". For a renewed Christian faith, all things are moving towards the consummation of God's designs for creation. With the coming of this dawn, God's plan has reached its great climax. Blessed with faith in Christ, we rejoice as we hear Isaiah giving expression to the messianic expectations of old Israel, because we recognise their amazing fulfilment in the story of Jesus, the son of David, the "Prince of Peace", bringing to the human family the "good new" – "Your God is King!"

Luke's gospel narrative is so well remembered because it is a masterpiece. Christ's birth is set on the world stage, within the "Pax Romana" of a mighty empire; and the nation's messianic expectations are fulfilled in Bethlehem, "the town of David". But contrasts soon emerge with these grand settings that fill this dawn of our salvation with gospel overtones, anticipating what is to take place as the Saviour's mission unfolds. The earthly pomp of the empire and the chequered history of the Davidic dynasty are far removed from this humble birth, amidst the overflow of a crowded inn – with a manger for a crib and a crowd of smelly shepherds as privileged witnesses. Rome's proud boast, that its legions have brought peace to the world, pales into insignificance for those who recognise what this birth means for the whole of creation - as the angel hosts sing "Glory to God" and "peace to all those who enjoy God's favour". The chatter of the shepherds is a foil to the response of Mary, the first of all Christian believers, looking into the future and "treasuring all these things and pondering them in her heart".

We have another very different masterpiece, in the opening passage of John's gospel. This telling of the same story is the fruit of a long meditation upon the dawning of the world's salvation: "In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word was God ... The Word was the true light that enlightens all men and he was coming into the world ... The Word was made flesh, he lived among us and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of God".

John Thornhill sm