

Proper 29  
Cycle C, RCL

Jeremiah 23:1-6

This passage reflects the closing days of Judah's existence as a nation. After Judah's defeat in 597 BCE Nebuchadnezzar installed *Zedekiah* ("the LORD is righteousness") as king in Jerusalem despite the fact that King Jehoiakin was still alive, living as a captive in Babylon. This situation resulted in a longing for the restoration of the legitimate kingship, and in this passage the prophet promises that God will indeed restore to Judah the "righteous branch" of David's royal line (23:5) and that God will install him on the throne with the name "the LORD is our righteousness," a play on the name of the current, illegitimate ruler.

Canticle 4 or Canticle 16 (Luke 1:68-79)

Canticles are songs/poems from scripture other than the songs of the Psalter. The word "canticle" has been extended in the west, though, to include the non-biblical *Te Deum* (Canticle 21 in the BCP). The BCP also inserts the equally non-biblical *Gloria in excelsis* (Canticle 20). In Greek usage and in the Septuagint (LXX) the Song of Zechariah is the second part of Canticle 9. The first part is the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). The BCP maintains this order but divides Greek Canticle 9 into Canticles 3, 4 (Rite I) and Canticles 15, 16 (Rite II). The beloved poems of Luke: the Magnificat, the Song of Zechariah, and the Song of Simeon have been placed in this gospel to interpret the events leading up to the birth of Jesus in the words of familiar religious songs. These poems may very well go back to Hebrew originals, for we now know from the Qumran Psalm Scroll of Cave 11 that other compositions besides the 150 psalms of our Psalter could be used as sacred hymns. Indeed, the Psalm Scroll contains a note that informs us that David wrote 4050 psalms, suggesting that the writer of the note knew a very large collection of psalms. That some of these psalms could end up in Greek translation in Luke does not stretch the imagination very far. Although the songs of Luke 1-2 are applied to the situations described in those chapters, there is nothing in any of them that mentions specifically John the Baptist, Mary, or Christ, let alone any details of Christ's birth.

Psalm 46

This hymn celebrates God's defense of Jerusalem against her enemies. The first strophe (46:1-4) promises that God would preserve the city even if the primeval waters broke forth as they did in the time of the Flood or if the mountains surrounding Jerusalem were to fall into the water. The second strophe (46:5-8) compares this chaos of waters with the peaceful underground stream of Gihon that was the city's secret water supply in times of danger. The third strophe (46:9-14) reminds the inhabitants that God and not the city's ancient walls comprise Jacob's stronghold.

Colossians 1:11-20

The unknown author and disciple of Paul responsible for Colossians has adapted an early Christian hymn (1:15-20) that celebrated Christ as creator and redeemer in language borrowed in part from contemporary Greek philosophy and religion. The author used the hymn to underscore the power of Christ to strengthen the Colossians for the trials to come.

Luke 23:35-43

The story of the penitent thief is unique to Luke. In response to the thief's request that Jesus remember him, Jesus promises that "today" he will be with Jesus in "paradise." In Luke 16:19-31 the author has Jesus employ the Greek notion of an underworld abode of the dead (Hades) where the wicked and the righteous are distinguished by the place they are given. The thief will find himself with Jesus in the luxuriant garden of the righteous. Jews often used the Persian loan-word *pardes* also to refer to the coming earthly kingdom of God. The penitent thief will be resurrected to have a share with Christ in this kingdom.

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