

Bible Challenge December 21-27, 2015

INTRODUCTION: *This week's readings are about celebrations, reactions to God's acts. Isaiah is responding to the promise that God will restore Israel. The psalmist responds to the realization that God is in charge of creation. Paul explains to the Galatians the significance of Jesus' birth. In the Gospel reading Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna all respond to Jesus' birth; each response is different. And, as Simeon warns Mary, not all the responses will be positive.*

FIRST READING: Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 61 (or Isaiah 61 and 62)

Explorer Challenge: Key metaphors in this passage are clothing and jewelry: *robe, garments, garland, jewels, crown, and diadem*. Use a concordance, bible dictionary, or the internet to learn more about clothing and jewelry in the Bible: What was clothing (regular and special) like at the time of Isaiah? What is the importance of clothing in Jewish society? How is clothing or jewelry used as a symbol in the Bible?

PSALM: Psalm 148.

The splendor of the LORD is over earth and heaven. (Ps. 148:13)

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 148. (Option: Compare Psalm 148 to Psalm 149.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research the meaning of *horn* in verse 14.

Option B. The psalmist makes something of a list to call on all of creation (as it was understood at the time) to praise God. What might a modern psalmist add to or exclude from this list in order to call on "all of creation" (as it is understood in the 21st century) to praise God?

SECOND READING: Galatians 4:4-7

Adventure Challenge: Galatians 4.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research the expression "the fullness of time."

Option B. Research adoption in Jewish culture or in the 1st century. (Are there examples of adoption in the Bible? Was it permitted in Jewish culture? Was it permitted or common in the Greco-Roman world?)

GOSPEL: Luke 2:21-40

Adventure Challenge: Luke 2.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read Leviticus 12 to learn what is "purification according to the law of Moses." (Note how many times the word *law* appears in the Luke passage.)

Option B. Make a list of all the different reactions to Jesus' birth that are mentioned or described in this passage. (Mary herself has several, starting with the purification rites.)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and yet more wonderfully restored it. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God. (*Ps. 98:3*)