

A reading from Genesis

¹⁸Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” ¹⁹So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. ²⁰He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

First Lesson – October 13 Harvest Thanksgiving

A reading from Deuteronomy

“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you as a special possession and you have conquered it and settled there, ² put some of the first produce from each crop you harvest into a basket and bring it to the designated place of worship—the place the LORD your God chooses for his name to be honored. ³ Go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, ‘With this gift I acknowledge to the LORD your God that I have entered the land he swore to our ancestors he would give us.’ ⁴ The priest will then take the basket from your hand and set it before the altar of the LORD your God.

⁵ “You must then say in the presence of the LORD your God, ‘My ancestor Jacob was a wandering Aramean who went to live as a foreigner in Egypt. His family arrived few in number, but in Egypt they became a large and mighty nation. ⁶ When the Egyptians oppressed and humiliated us by making us their slaves, ⁷ we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors. He heard our cries and saw our hardship, toil, and oppression. ⁸ So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and powerful arm, with overwhelming terror, and with miraculous signs and wonders. ⁹ He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey! ¹⁰ And now, O LORD, I have brought you the first portion of the harvest you have given me from the ground.’ Then place the produce before the LORD your God, and bow to the ground in worship before him. ¹¹ Afterward you may go and celebrate because of all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your household. Remember to include the Levites and the foreigners living among you in the celebration.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

Second Lesson – October 13 Harvest Thanksgiving

A reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians

⁴ Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! ⁵ Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

⁸ And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. ⁹ Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Joel

²³ Rejoice, you people of Jerusalem!

Rejoice in the LORD your God!

For the rain he sends demonstrates his faithfulness.

Once more the autumn rains will come,

as well as the rains of spring.

²⁴ The threshing floors will again be piled high with grain,

and the presses will overflow with new wine and olive oil.

²⁵ The LORD says, “I will give you back what you lost

to the swarming locusts, the hopping locusts,

the stripping locusts, and the cutting locusts.

It was I who sent this great destroying army against you.

²⁶ Once again you will have all the food you want,

and you will praise the LORD your God,

who does these miracles for you.

Never again will my people be disgraced.

²⁷ Then you will know that I am among my people Israel,

that I am the LORD your God, and there is no other.

Never again will my people be disgraced.

²⁸ “Then, after doing all those things,

I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

Your old men will dream dreams,

and your young men will see visions.

²⁹ In those days I will pour out my Spirit
even on servants—men and women alike.

³⁰ And I will cause wonders in the heavens and on the earth—
blood and fire and columns of smoke.

³¹ The sun will become dark,
and the moon will turn blood red
before that great and terrible day of the LORD arrives.

³² But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD
will be saved,
for some on Mount Zion in Jerusalem will escape,
just as the LORD has said.

These will be among the survivors
whom the LORD has called.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

Second Lesson – October 27

A reading from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy

⁶As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. ⁸And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.

¹⁶The first time I was brought before the judge, no one came with me. Everyone abandoned me. May it not be counted against them. ¹⁷But the Lord stood with me and gave me strength so that I might preach the Good News in its entirety for all the Gentiles to hear. And he rescued me from certain death. ¹⁸Yes, and the Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely into his heavenly Kingdom. All glory to God forever and ever! Amen.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from Daniel

Earlier, during the first year of King Belshazzar's reign in Babylon, Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he lay in his bed. He wrote down the dream, and this is what he saw.

² In my vision that night, I, Daniel, saw a great storm churning the surface of a great sea, with strong winds blowing from every direction. ³ Then four huge beasts came up out of the water, each different from the others.

¹⁵ I, Daniel, was troubled by all I had seen, and my visions terrified me. ¹⁶ So I approached one of those standing beside the throne and asked him what it all meant. He explained it to me like this: ¹⁷ "These four huge beasts represent four kingdoms that will arise from the earth. ¹⁸ But in the end, the holy people of the Most High will be given the kingdom, and they will rule forever and ever."

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

¹¹ Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

¹² God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. ¹³ And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. ¹⁴ The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

¹⁵ Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, ¹⁶ I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, ¹⁷ asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. ¹⁸ I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

¹⁹ I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power ²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. ²¹ Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. ²² God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. ²³ And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Haggai

Then on October 17 of that same year, the LORD sent another message through the prophet Haggai. ² “Say this to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of God’s people there in the land: ³ ‘Does anyone remember this house—this Temple—in its former splendor? How, in comparison, does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing at all! ⁴ But now the LORD says: Be strong, Zerubbabel. Be strong, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people still left in the land. And now get to work, for I am with you, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. ⁵ My Spirit remains among you, just as I promised when you came out of Egypt. So do not be afraid.’

⁶ “For this is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: In just a little while I will again shake the heavens and the earth, the oceans and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all the nations, and the treasures of all the nations will be brought to this Temple. I will fill this place with glory, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. ⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. ⁹ The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. And in this place I will bring peace. I, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, have spoken!”

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

Second Reading – November 10

A reading from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians

Now, dear brothers and sisters, let us clarify some things about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered to meet him. ² Don't be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don't believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us. ³ Don't be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction. ⁴ He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God.

⁵ Don't you remember that I told you about all this when I was with you?

¹³ As for us, we can't help but thank God for you, dear brothers and sisters loved by the Lord. We are always thankful that God chose you to be among the first to experience salvation—a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and through your belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to salvation when we told you the Good News; now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ With all these things in mind, dear brothers and sisters, stand firm and keep a strong grip on the teaching we passed on to you both in person and by letter.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope, ¹⁷ comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

¹⁷ “Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth,
and no one will even think about the old ones anymore.

¹⁸ Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation!
And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness.
Her people will be a source of joy.

¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and delight in my people.

And the sound of weeping and crying
will be heard in it no more.

²⁰ “No longer will babies die when only a few days old.
No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life.
No longer will people be considered old at one hundred!
Only the cursed will die that young!

²¹ In those days people will live in the houses they build
and eat the fruit of their own vineyards.

²² Unlike the past, invaders will not take their houses
and confiscate their vineyards.

For my people will live as long as trees,
and my chosen ones will have time to enjoy their hard-won
gains.

²³ They will not work in vain,
and their children will not be doomed to misfortune.

For they are people blessed by the LORD,

and their children, too, will be blessed.

²⁴ I will answer them before they even call to me.

While they are still talking about their needs,

I will go ahead and answer their prayers!

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together.

The lion will eat hay like a cow.

But the snakes will eat dust.

In those days no one will be hurt or destroyed on my holy mountain.

I, the LORD, have spoken!”

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

Second Reading – November 17

A reading from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians

⁶ And now, dear brothers and sisters, we give you this command in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Stay away from all believers who live idle lives and don't follow the tradition they received from us.

⁷ For you know that you ought to imitate us. We were not idle when we were with you. ⁸ We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. We worked hard day and night so we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We certainly had the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to give you an example to follow. ¹⁰ Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: "Those unwilling to work will not get to eat."

¹¹ Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people's business. ¹² We command such people and urge them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and work to earn their own living. ¹³ As for the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, never get tired of doing good.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah

“What sorrow awaits the leaders of my people—the shepherds of my sheep—for they have destroyed and scattered the very ones they were expected to care for,” says the LORD.

² Therefore, this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to these shepherds: “Instead of caring for my flock and leading them to safety, you have deserted them and driven them to destruction. Now I will pour out judgment on you for the evil you have done to them.

³ But I will gather together the remnant of my flock from the countries where I have driven them. I will bring them back to their own sheepfold, and they will be fruitful and increase in number. ⁴ Then I will appoint responsible shepherds who will care for them, and they will never be afraid again. Not a single one will be lost or missing. I, the LORD have spoken!

⁵ “For the time is coming,”

says the LORD,

“when I will raise up a righteous descendant

from King David’s line.

He will be a King who rules with wisdom.

He will do what is just and right throughout the land.

⁶ And this will be his name:

‘The LORD Is Our Righteousness.’

In that day Judah will be saved,

and Israel will live in safety.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from Paul's Letter to the Colossians

¹¹ We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, ¹² always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, ¹⁴ who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.

¹⁵ Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

¹⁶ for through him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see
and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

¹⁷ He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.

¹⁸ Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body.

He is the beginning,
supreme over all who rise from the dead.

So he is first in everything.

¹⁹ For God in all his fullness

was pleased to live in Christ,

²⁰ and through him God reconciled

everything to himself.

He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth

by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

This is a vision that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

² In the last days, the mountain of the LORD's house
will be the highest of all—
the most important place on earth.

It will be raised above the other hills,
and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.

³ People from many nations will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of Jacob's God.

There he will teach us his ways,
and we will walk in his paths.”

For the LORD's teaching will go out from Zion;
his word will go out from Jerusalem.

⁴ The LORD will mediate between nations
and will settle international disputes.

They will hammer their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will no longer fight against nation,
nor train for war anymore.

⁵ Come, descendants of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from Paul's letter to the Romans

¹¹ This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living. ¹³ Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see. Don't participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

¹ Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot—
yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.

² And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ He will delight in obeying the LORD.
He will not judge by appearance
nor make a decision based on hearsay.

⁴ He will give justice to the poor
and make fair decisions for the exploited.
The earth will shake at the force of his word,
and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked.

⁵ He will wear righteousness like a belt
and truth like an undergarment.

⁶ In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together;
the leopard will lie down with the baby goat.
The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion,
and a little child will lead them all.

⁷ The cow will graze near the bear.
The cub and the calf will lie down together.
The lion will eat hay like a cow.

⁸ The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra.

Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes
without harm.

⁹ Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,

for as the waters fill the sea,

so the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD.

¹⁰ In that day the heir to David's throne

will be a banner of salvation to all the world.

The nations will rally to him,

and the land where he lives will be a glorious place.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the Paul's Letter to the Romans

⁴ Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.

⁵ May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. ⁶ Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory. ⁸ Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. ⁹ He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote:

“For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles;
I will sing praises to your name.”

¹⁰ And in another place it is written,

“Rejoice with his people,
you Gentiles.”

¹¹ And yet again,

“Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles.
Praise him, all you people of the earth.”

¹² And in another place Isaiah said,

“The heir to David's throne will come,
and he will rule over the Gentiles.

They will place their hope on him.”

¹³ I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from Genesis

⁵ For the LORD God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. ⁶ Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land. ⁷ Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

⁸ Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. ⁹ The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁵ The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. ¹⁶ But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—¹⁷ except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." ¹⁹ So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. ²⁰ He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.

²³ "At last!" the man exclaimed.

"This one is bone from my bone,

and flesh from my flesh!

She will be called 'woman,'

because she was taken from 'man.' ”

²⁴ This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

²⁵ Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

¹ “Comfort, comfort my people,”
says your God.

² “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.
Tell her that her sad days are gone
and her sins are pardoned.

Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over
for all her sins.”

³ Listen! It’s the voice of someone shouting,
“Clear the way through the wilderness
for the LORD!

Make a straight highway through the wasteland
for our God!

⁴ Fill in the valleys,
and level the mountains and hills.

Straighten the curves,
and smooth out the rough places.

⁵ Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
The LORD has spoken!”

⁶ A voice said, “Shout!”
I asked, “What should I shout?”
“Shout that people are like the grass.

Their beauty fades as quickly
as the flowers in a field.

⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fade
beneath the breath of the LORD.

And so it is with people.

⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fade,
but the word of our God stands forever.”

⁹ O Zion, messenger of good news,
shout from the mountaintops!

Shout it louder, O Jerusalem.

Shout, and do not be afraid.

Tell the towns of Judah,
“Your God is coming!”

¹⁰ Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in power.
He will rule with a powerful arm.

See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.

¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd.

He will carry the lambs in his arms,
holding them close to his heart.

He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

¹ Oh, that you would burst from the heavens and come down!
How the mountains would quake in your presence!

² As fire causes wood to burn
and water to boil,
your coming would make the nations tremble.

Then your enemies would learn the reason for your fame!

³ When you came down long ago,
you did awesome deeds beyond our highest expectations.
And oh, how the mountains quaked!

⁴ For since the world began,
no ear has heard
and no eye has seen a God like you,
who works for those who wait for him!

⁵ You welcome those who gladly do good,
who follow godly ways.

But you have been very angry with us,
for we are not godly.

We are constant sinners;
how can people like us be saved?

⁶ We are all infected and impure with sin.
When we display our righteous deeds,

they are nothing but filthy rags.

Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall,
and our sins sweep us away like the wind.

⁷ Yet no one calls on your name
or pleads with you for mercy.

Therefore, you have turned away from us
and turned us over to our sins.

⁸ And yet, O LORD, you are our Father.
We are the clay, and you are the potter.
We all are formed by your hand.

⁹ Don't be so angry with us, LORD.
Please don't remember our sins forever.

Look at us, we pray,
and see that we are all your people.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Micah

⁶ What can we bring to the LORD?

Should we bring him burnt offerings?

Should we bow before God Most High

with offerings of yearling calves?

⁷ Should we offer him thousands of rams

and ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Should we sacrifice our firstborn children

to pay for our sins?

⁸ No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good,

and this is what he requires of you:

to do what is right, to love mercy,

and to walk humbly with your God.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

¹ Even the wilderness and desert will be glad in those days.

The wasteland will rejoice and blossom with spring crocuses.

² Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers
and singing and joy!

The deserts will become as green as the mountains of Lebanon,
as lovely as Mount Carmel or the plain of Sharon.

There the LORD will display his glory,
the splendor of our God.

³ With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands,
and encourage those who have weak knees.

⁴ Say to those with fearful hearts,
“Be strong, and do not fear,
for your God is coming to destroy your enemies.
He is coming to save you.”

⁵ And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind
and unplug the ears of the deaf.

⁶ The lame will leap like a deer,
and those who cannot speak will sing for joy!

Springs will gush forth in the wilderness,
and streams will water the wasteland.

⁷ The parched ground will become a pool,
and springs of water will satisfy the thirsty land.

Marsh grass and reeds and rushes will flourish
where desert jackals once lived.

⁸ And a great road will go through that once deserted land.
It will be named the Highway of Holiness.

Evil-minded people will never travel on it.
It will be only for those who walk in God's ways;
fools will never walk there.

⁹ Lions will not lurk along its course,
nor any other ferocious beasts.

There will be no other dangers.
Only the redeemed will walk on it.

¹⁰ Those who have been ransomed by the LORD will return.
They will enter Jerusalem singing,
crowned with everlasting joy.

Sorrow and mourning will disappear,
and they will be filled with joy and gladness.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke

⁵ When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. ⁶ Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. ⁷ They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. ⁹ As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. ¹⁴ You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶ And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly."

¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years."

¹⁹ Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! ²⁰ But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.”

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. ²² When he finally did come out, he couldn’t speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.

²³ When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. ²⁴ Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. ²⁵ “How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.”

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

Seventh Lesson – December 15 Lessons & Carols

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

³⁵ The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For the word of God will never fail.”

³⁸ Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

Eighth Reading – December 15 Lessons & Carols

A reading from the gospel according to John

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

¹⁰ Later, the LORD sent this message to King Ahaz: ¹¹ “Ask the LORD your God for a sign of confirmation, Ahaz. Make it as difficult as you want—as high as heaven or as deep as the place of the dead.”

¹² But the king refused. “No,” he said, “I will not test the LORD like that.”

¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Listen well, you royal family of David! Isn’t it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you exhaust the patience of my God as well? ¹⁴ All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’). ¹⁵ By the time this child is old enough to choose what is right and reject what is wrong, he will be eating yogurt and honey. ¹⁶ For before the child is that old, the lands of the two kings you fear so much will both be deserted.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans

This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. ² God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. ³ The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line, ⁴ and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name.

⁶ And you are included among those Gentiles who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. ⁷ I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people.

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

² The people who walk in darkness
will see a great light.

For those who live in a land of deep darkness,
a light will shine.

³ You will enlarge the nation of Israel,
and its people will rejoice.

They will rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest
and like warriors dividing the plunder.

⁴ For you will break the yoke of their slavery
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,
just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

⁵ The boots of the warrior
and the uniforms bloodstained by war
will all be burned.

They will be fuel for the fire.

⁶ For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.

The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His government and its peace
will never end.

He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his
ancestor David
for all eternity.

The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

**Second Reading – Christmas Eve
11:00pm – Traditional Service**

A reading from Paul's Letter to Titus

¹¹ For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. ¹² And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, ¹³ while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. ¹⁴ He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

⁷ I will tell of the LORD's unfailing love.

I will praise the LORD for all he has done.

I will rejoice in his great goodness to Israel,

which he has granted according to his mercy and love.

⁸ He said, "They are my very own people.

Surely they will not betray me again."

And he became their Savior.

⁹ In all their suffering he also suffered,

and he personally rescued them.

In his love and mercy he redeemed them.

He lifted them up and carried them

through all the years.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

¹⁰ God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that he should make Jesus, through his suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation.

¹¹ So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. ¹² For he said to God,

“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.

I will praise you among your assembled people.”

¹³ He also said,

“I will put my trust in him,”

that is, “I and the children God has given me.”

¹⁴ Because God’s children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. ¹⁵ Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

¹⁶ We also know that the Son did not come to help angels; he came to help the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

