

**First Sunday after Christmas**  
**Cycles A, B, and C RCL**  
**Revised**

**Isaiah 61:10–62:3**

The miraculous salvation of Jerusalem signified to the nations God's power and faithfulness according to the so-called "Second Isaiah" (Isaiah 40–55). Our poem, however, occurs within the chapters commonly called "Third Isaiah" (Isaiah 56–66). In point of fact, though, both First Isaiah (Isaiah 1–39) and Third Isaiah (55–66) contain poems that so exactly reflect the language and thought of Second Isaiah that we must assign this passage to the writer of chapters 40-55. The speaker in 61:10-12 differs from the speaker in 62:1-3, but apparently the editors of our lectionary selected 61:10-62:3 on the misapprehension that the two are the same. The first speaker, though, is Jerusalem herself, as the Aramaic paraphrase (Targum) makes clear by prefacing 61:10 with the words "Jerusalem says." Jerusalem will wear "garments of salvation" and "the robe of righteousness and finds herself adorned as a bride (61:10). The prophet's speech in 62:1-3 gives an oracle about the vindication of Jerusalem.

**Psalm 147**

The last five psalms (Psalms 146–150) are *hymns* that all begin and end with the exclamation "Praise the LORD" (*hallelu-ya*). Hymns ordinarily celebrated some aspect of God's power and providence and were integral parts of the liturgy of the Temple. This hymn, however, stems from the post-exilic period, referring clearly to the historical events surrounding the nation's return from Babylon. Verses 2, 14 may refer to the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls under Nehemiah. Nehemiah 12:27-43 describes the ceremony of celebration for the walls, and our psalm would fit the mood if not the actual event. The use of language familiar from the Second Isaiah is also a clue to the post-exilic setting of the psalm.

**Galatians 3:23–25; 4:4–7**

In this angry letter, Paul complains that the Galatian Christians have replaced the Gospel he brought them with "another gospel" (Galatians 1:6). This "other gospel" was an esoteric teaching that combined elements of the Jewish Law, such as circumcision, with elements of astrology ("elemental spirits of the universe," 4:3, Greek: *stoicheia*). Some find in this esoteric teaching a precursor to what later came to be called Gnosticism. The Aramaic word *Abba*, used in reference to God in 4:6, was likely not a familiar term of endearment ("Daddy!"), as it is in modern Hebrew, but was an Aramaic "emphatic" that would be reasonably formal ("O Father!").

**John 1:1–18**

The author combines the Stoic idea of the "word" (*logos*) as the single, divine element in universe with the Jewish idea of the Wisdom of God as preceding the creation of the world and being the organizing principle of creation. Whatever this divine word or wisdom became a living human being, Jesus of Nazareth, and through this human being we mortals can see the fullness of divinity. For the anonymous writer of this Gospel, then, the story of Jesus represents the manifestation of the eternal *logos* in space and time.