

Home Worship December 13th 3rd Sunday of Advent

Welcome to worship. You may wish to gather bread and juice or wine for communion during worship. Advent candles will be lit if you desire to light yours.

With 2 weeks until Christmas Eve I am we are all saddened that we will not be together in the church building. Your council is working with hopes to provide safe worship sometime in the New Year. I hope you will watch for our special Christmas Eve video with message and music.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, whose forgiveness is sure and whose steadfast love endures forever. **Amen.**

Together let us honestly and humbly confess that we have not lived as God desires.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Loving and forgiving God, **we confess that we are held captive by sin. In spite of our best efforts, we have gone astray. We have not welcomed the stranger; we have not loved our neighbor; we have not been Christ to one another. Restore us, O God. Wake us up and turn us from our sin. Renew us each day in the light of Christ. Amen.**

People of God, hear this glad news: by God's endless grace your sins are forgiven, and you are free—free from all that holds you back and free to live in the peaceable realm of God.

May you be strengthened in God's love, ☩ comforted by Christ's peace, and accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Advent Candle Lighting

3 Light three candles to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness. Lift your heads and lift high the gateway for the King of glory.

Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Though the people had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, they continued to face hardship and oppression. In the language of the jubilee year described in Leviticus 25, the prophet, moved by the spirit of God, announces deliverance for those who are oppressed and comfort for those who mourn.

¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;

²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

³to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

⁸For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Psalm 126

¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream.

²**Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy.**

Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

³The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed.

⁴**Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses of the Negeb.**

⁵Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy.

⁶**Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.**

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians by encouraging them to live lives of continual joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. The closing blessing is grounded in the hope of Christ's coming.

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil. ²³May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

The Holy Gospel according to John 1:6-8, 19-28

Glory to you O Lord

John's gospel describes Jesus as the "light of the world." John the Baptist is presented as a witness to Jesus, one who directs attention away from himself to Christ, the true light.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' " as the prophet Isaiah said. ²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. The word of the Lord.....

Praise to you O Christ

Sermon

John the Baptist is a mystery from the beginning. "Who are you?" the delegation from Jerusalem asks. He is quick to say who he is not. He is not the Messiah, and he is not one of those persons expected by some as forerunner of the Messiah: he is not Elijah returned to earth, and he is not "the prophet" like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). Instead, John is the voice proclaiming the need for people to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. The message is more important than the identity of the messenger.

For us to “make straight the way of the Lord” is a matter of reflecting on the ways we live our lives. The way we conduct our lives can help or inhibit our relationship to God and to each other. Every day is a day that we can examine ourselves in relationship to God. Today we hear John the Baptist say that we should get on with it.

One of my favorite memories of worshipping with the St. Mark’s family was the summer we had twelve weeks of testimonies from twelve different members. Each of them gave their faith story and stories of how their faith and their church had shaped their lives. On one Sunday, we had a couple who felt like their life was not complete because they were not married in the sanctuary, a symbol of their faith. In a surprise move, the husband proposed to his wife and they renewed their vows with the congregation present at that moment. So many ways to witness!

John’s Gospel also begins without a birth narrative. No birth of Jesus with his parents, in an inn, no angels or magi. John begins his witness with “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*” Present with God and in God from the creation. This is the Light of the world of whom John testifies. The Light which shines in the darkness of the world—is a core message in John’s testimony. John is witness, not of his own accord, but sent by God.

The term “witness” or some form of it appears over fifty times in this Gospel. Witness as used by John refers to the character and significance of God’s person. The term “testimony,” gives the sense of judicial proceedings or a trial scene comes into view. Credible witnesses are crucial to the judicial process; their accounts of events may have life and death consequences for those for whom they testify. Character witnesses offer testimony to “positive or negative character traits and the person’s reputation and conduct in the community.” They offer evidence that corroborates or dispels the image(s) presented of the person during court hearings. The “cosmic trial”³ to come is against Jesus who claims to give eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and to be one with God. John’s evidence for belief in Jesus is rooted in God’s revelation of the Divine.

John’s testimony of Jesus spans across time as we look forward in this Advent season. We are reminded to thoughtfully consider our testimonies of word and deed. We ask ourselves if our lives witness to the light of God within us?

In the midst of darkness, disappointments, and dreary outlooks, this pandemic and other grief we bear, God sent Light into the world. Trying times have the possibility to yield tremendous testimonies.

May God’s people ever bear witness that the Light is come and is now here. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

God of power and might, shine your radiance and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need. ***A brief silence.*** God of preachers and messengers, you have entrusted your church with the work of proclaiming good news.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of all peoples and nations, you plant us as your oaks of righteousness and ask us to care for one another. Be present with the leaders of every nation as they govern. Give them a spirit of righteousness, that your goodness and mercy is revealed through their actions.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of the powerful and helpless, you clothe us with strength when our spirits are weak and weary. Bestow your spirit upon this congregation and empower us to comfort the people who turn to us in times of need. Make your church a place of refuge and healing.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of sinners and saints, you offer joy even in the midst of our grief. We are grateful for the beloved, imperfect people whose lives testified to your radiant love. Anoint all who mourn with the oil of gladness. Be with those also in need of healing especially **Karla Gipe. Joyce Greenawalt and Brad Shippert. We pray for the families suffering with the coronavirus and we pray for an end to the virus with safe vaccinations and treatments. We pray for those in care facilities: Sibyl, Barb, Tammy, Trudy, Jessica, Hazel, Jeanne and Linda. We pray for those in military service: Logan, JJ, Bryan, Dustin, Brad and Travis).**

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Offering

Generous God, you have created all that is, and you provide for us in every season. Bless all that we offer, that through these gifts the world will receive your blessing. In the name of Jesus, Emmanuel, we pray. **Amen.**

Gathered into one by the power of the Holy Spirit we pray as Jesus taught the disciples...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Even as we watch and wait, Christ is here. Come, eat and drink.

Holy Communion Together

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You comforted your people with the promise of the Redeemer, through whom you will also make all things new in the day when he comes to judge the world in righteousness.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Take your bread/wafer	The body of Christ given for you
Take you juice/wine	The blood of Christ shed for you

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in His grace.

Prayer after Communion

Gracious and abundant God, you have done great things for us, and we rejoice. In this bread and cup you give us life forever. In your boundless mercy, strengthen us and open our hearts to the world's needs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Blessing

The Creator of the stars bless your Advent waiting, the long-expected Savior fill you with love, the unexpected Spirit guide your journey, ☩ now and forever. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Thank you for your offerings

Stay in touch if you or someone you know needs help and or prayer.