

Second Sunday of Advent 🕯 December 6, 2020

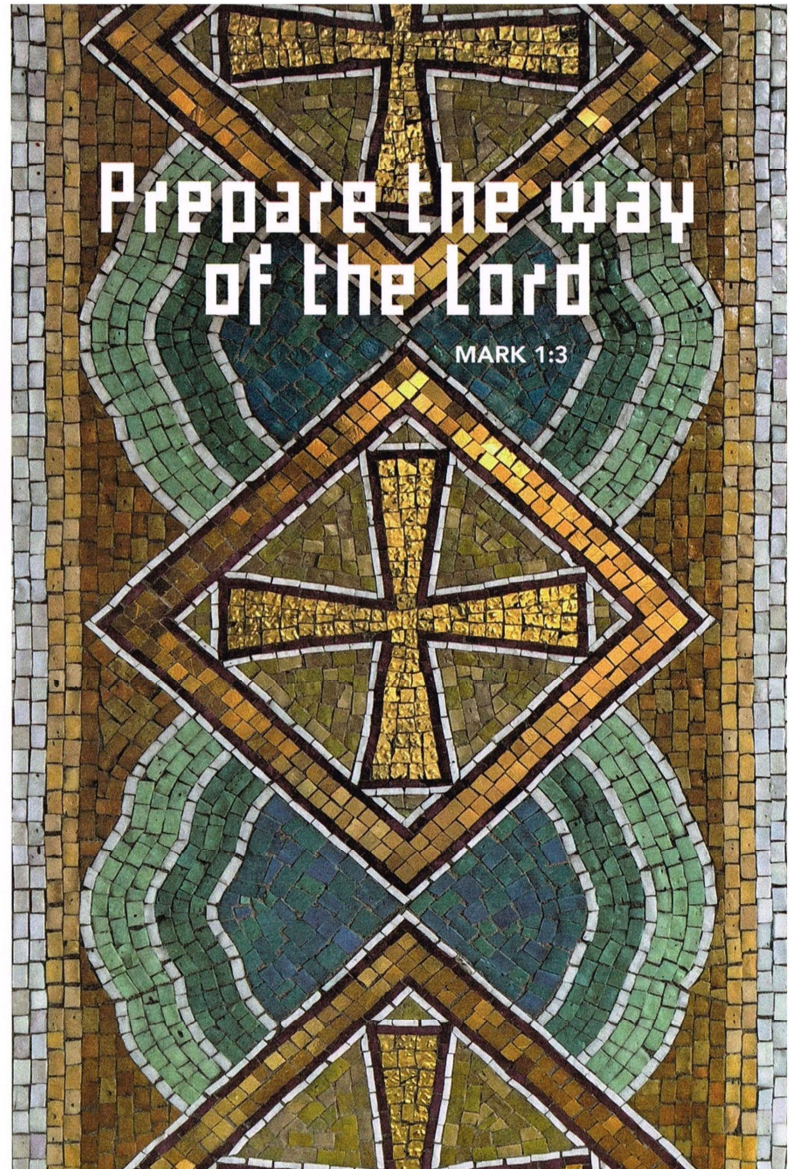
Pointing to Christ

Mark's gospel opens with fanfare: a herald announcing the good news that the Lord is on the way! It's time to prepare for the Savior! The role model for this process of preparation is an unusual character. He lives in the wild, wears animal skins, and eats insects. Because of his extreme lifestyle, John the Baptist is often portrayed as a madman living on the fringes of society.

Yet, the text makes clear that John was a respected faith leader. People from all over the region were coming to him to be baptized. In John's context, living in the desert and eating a foraged diet were signs of spiritual commitment, not lunacy. We might imagine John as a precursor to the Christian desert mothers and fathers who came after him, wise teachers who lived in voluntary isolation. People made a point to come hear what these teachers had to say.

John used his influence to point to Jesus. Although he had a popular ministry of his own, John understood that his call to prepare the way for Jesus involved humility and service. He told others he wasn't even worthy to untie Jesus' sandals, a sentiment that was meant to elevate Jesus, not to demean John. He wanted to communicate how transformative Jesus' ministry would be. "I have baptized with water," John proclaimed, "but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8).

As we declare in our baptismal rite, that same Holy Spirit calls us into baptism and seals us with the mark of Christ forever. We, like John, are called to humble service for the sake of God's mission in the world, to use our unique gifts and vocations to point to Jesus. We become messengers proclaiming the good news: God has come to dwell with us.





Celebrate

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John calls people to repent, to clear the decks, to completely reorder their lives so that nothing gets in the way of the Lord's coming. The reading from Isaiah gives the context for this radical call: the assurance of forgiveness that encourages us to repent; the promise that the coming one will be gentle with the little ones. Isaiah calls us all to be heralds with John, to lift up our voices fearlessly and say, "See, your God is coming!" We say it to one another in worship, in order to say it with our lives in a world in need of justice and peace.

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming strengthen us to serve you with purified lives; 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 40:1-11

In grand, flowing, poetic lines, the prophet announces that the exile of God's people in Babylon is over. God will deliver Israel and will care for her as a shepherd cares for the sheep. This word can be trusted, because the only enduring reality in life is the word of God.

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's
hand
double for all her sins.

³A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way
of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a
highway for our God.

⁴Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be
made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵Then the glory of the LORD shall be
revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has
spoken."

⁶A voice says, "Cry out!"
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of
the field.

⁷The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows
upon it;
surely the people are grass.

⁸The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand
forever.

⁹Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

¹⁰See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

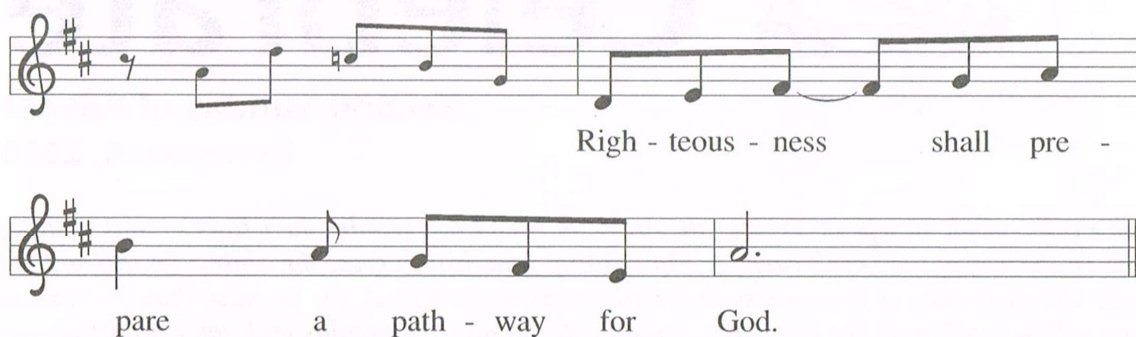
continued

First Reading, continued

¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd; and carry them in his bosom,
he will gather the lambs in his arms, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Psalm

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; refrain, Ps. 85:13



You have been gracious to your ¹land, O LORD;
you have restored the good for- ¹tune of Jacob.

²**You have forgiven the iniquity ¹of your people
and blotted out ¹all their sins.**

⁸I will listen to what the LORD ¹God is saying;
for you speak peace to your faithful people
and to those who turn their ¹hearts to you.

⁹**Truly, your salvation is very near to ¹those who fear you,
that your glory may dwell ¹in our land. R**

¹⁰Steadfast love and faithfulness have ¹met together;
righteousness and peace have ¹kissed each other.

¹¹**Faithfulness shall spring up ¹from the earth,
and righteousness shall look ¹down from heaven.**

¹²The LORD will indeed ¹grant prosperity,
and our land will ¹yield its increase.

¹³**Righteousness shall go be- ¹fore the LORD
and shall prepare for ¹God a pathway. R**

Second Reading

2 Peter 3:8-15a

This short letter deals with pressing concerns regarding the final advent of Jesus, especially concerns that could arise over its apparent delay. The author of the letter calls on Christians to anticipate the promised coming of the Lord through conduct dedicated to God.

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

¹¹Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons

ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹²waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

Gospel

Mark 1:1-8

The Gospel of Mark does not begin with a story of Jesus' birth but with the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way;

³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole

Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

God of power and might, comfort your people and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

A brief silence.

Faithful God, you teach us to wait for you with faithfulness and patience. Sustain and support us in our doubts and questions. Nurture our faith as we discern and enact your mission. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Loving God, you set the stars in the sky and breathe life into the earth. Renew the face of creation where it is in need of your healing touch. Mend the wounds of environmental damage and restore balance to ecosystems so that all creation can declare your praise. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Steadfast God, you never tire of seeking justice. Where people suffer from discrimination, judgment, and injustice, speak words of truth and comfort. We pray especially for . . . (*current local, national, or international issues of peace or justice may be named*). Lead us toward a world where faithfulness will sprout underfoot and righteousness rain down from above. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Leading God, you ask us to make uneven ground smooth. Make even the disparities between your people. Sustain and support people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Accompany disability advocates who work for a world accessible to all. Teach us to celebrate the great diversity in our midst. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

Tender God, you know sorrow and joy alike. We pray for those in our families and congregation who are not joyful in this holiday season. Comfort those who grieve, be a companion to all who are lonely, tend those who are sick or struggling with depression, and gather all people in your healing embrace. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Eternal God, we give thanks for the saints who have prepared your way in the wilderness and taught us to continue their faithful work (*especially Nicholas of Myra*). Make their generous lives an example for all. 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.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday (commemoration of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, 397) Psalm 27. **Tuesday** Isaiah 4:2-6. **Wednesday** Luke 1:5-17. **Thursday** Psalm 126. **Friday** Philippians 3:12-16. **Saturday** Habakkuk 3:13-19. **Third Sunday of Advent** (commemoration of Lucy, martyr, 304) Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126 or Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28.

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