

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 13, 2020

INTRODUCTION

“Rejoice always,” begins the reading from 1 Thessalonians. Isaiah and the psalmist make clear that God is turning our mourning into laughter and shouts of joy. “All God’s children got a robe,” go the words of a spiritual. It is not so much a stately, formal, pressed outfit as it is a set of party clothes, clothes we are happy to wear. We receive that robe in baptism, and in worship we gather for a foretaste of God’s party.

PRELUDE

GATHERING

God calls us together in worship

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.**

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

Reader One: Isaiah the Prophet announced it. The Spirit of God is with me, because I have been chosen to bring good news to the abused, to bandage the wounds of the heartbroken, and to release those who are in prisons of all kinds. I am here to proclaim a good year in God's sight, a time when things will be set right.

Reader Two: I am here to comfort the grieving and to dress them for happy times instead of sad ones.

Reader One: The people who are healed and comforted will be like strong trees, upright and loyal to God. They will be like a forest planted to show God's glory. They will rebuild the world and show everyone God's power.

Reader Two: We wait for the day of God's joy, and live in God's peace and hope, as we light these candles.

(Please pause as we light three candles, then respond.)

All: Loving God, come and shine your light in the world!

GATHERING HYMN: *Prepare the Royal Highway*

1 Prepare the royal highway; the King of kings is near!

Let ev'ry hill and valley a level road appear!

Then greet the King of glory, foretold in sacred story:

Refrain: Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's word!

2 God's people, see him coming: your own eternal king!

Palm branches strew before him! Spread garments! Shout and sing!

God's promise will not fail you! No more shall doubt assail you! Refrain

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

KYRIE

Lord, have mercy: Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy: Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy: Lord, have mercy.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. **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.

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture, reading, preaching, and song

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.

Word of God. Word of Life. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 126

The LORD has done great things for us. (Ps. 126:3)

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

**²Then 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.

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

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

**⁶Those 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.

Word of God. Word of Life. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL: John 1:6-8, 19-28

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.

The holy gospel according to John, the first chapter. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

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 gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY: *What Child Is This*

*1 What child is this, who, laid to rest,
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the king,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;*

*haste, haste to bring him laud,
the babe, the son of Mary!*

2 *Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
the cross be borne for me, for you;
hail, hail the Word made flesh,
the babe, the son of Mary!*

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.* On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Each petition will end with:

"Hear us, O God,"

You may respond with: "Your mercy is great."

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. Strengthen the witness of bishops, pastors, deacons, church musicians, lay leaders, and all people who contribute their prayers and talents to public worship (*the congregation's worship leaders may be named*). Embed your word in their hearts. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of every living creature, you announce the year of your favor for all of creation. Extend your kindness and relief to endangered animals and plants. Strengthen the human beings who rely on the rhythms of nature to make their living. 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 exiles and wanderers, you repair what was once destroyed. We pray for people who have been displaced from their homes by fire, flood, earthquake, or storm. Support the work of Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Disaster Response, and all disaster relief organizations in their recovery efforts. 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.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

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 especially Lucy, martyr of the church. Anoint all who mourn with the oil of gladness. 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.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

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.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

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.

SENDING SONG: *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

Refrain

*Go tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and ev'rywhere;
go tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born!*

*1 While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
behold, throughout the heavens
there shone a holy light. Refrain*

*2 The shepherds feared and trembled
when, lo, above the earth
rang out the angel chorus
that hailed our Savior's birth. Refrain*

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.