

Sunday, December 13, 2020

Third Sunday of Advent

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.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Let us come together in this place to feel the warmth of God’s presence.

We are here to spend time with our Creator and listen for the Spirit.

God waits for us. God calls us to place our trust in Him, our Creator and Redeemer.

God calls us to listen once again for the voice of the Spirit speaking to us in our lives.

We find ourselves weary and broken. Only You can heal us and refresh us.

Only You can open our hearts and minds.

Let us remember who created us and loves us just as we are.

Let us worship together as we await the coming of the Messiah. **Amen.**

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Almighty God, you know us inside and out. You are present alongside us in our past, present, and future. We cannot escape your presence. You know us before we were born. You watch over us day and night, and always hear our prayers.

We come before you now wanting to hear your voice. Forgive us when we stray and bring us closer to your Spirit once again. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection

God of love, **We confess that we have turned away from you, God. We have not trusted in your promises to hear us. We have not believed that you are by our side through everything in our lives. We let worry and fear consume us. We do not always treat our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may know your deep love for us again and glorify your holy name in all that we say and do. Amen.**

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was crucified and died for us and for all our sins. As a minister of the church of Christ, I declare to you that God forgives all of your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. God has never left you. Return to the Lord your God, with joyful hearts, ready to accept God’s gift of grace. **Amen.**

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.**

ADVENT WREATH 3

We adore you, O God, and we are thankful for our community of faith and all of our ecumenical partners. Continue to guide our ministry and grace us with the light of your continued presence in the coming year. Bless all of our neighbors and friends in and around Somers Point. As we light three candles, strengthen our hearts as we await the Lord's coming in glory. Grant all these things through Christ, our Lord, whose coming is certain and whose day draws near. **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: 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.

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.

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.

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. Strengthen the witness of bishops, pastors, deacons, church musicians, lay leaders, and all people who contribute their prayers and talents to public worship. 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.**

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 we name....*).

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.**

OFFERING PRAYER

Let us pray together over the gifts we have received....Almighty God,

You are Creator of all that is in heaven and on earth. We rejoice that we have many blessings to be thankful for in our lives. You have changed our lives forever with your grace. Grant us courage to change the lives of others with your Good News. Bless our congregation, this community, and all the offerings we give back to you for your holy work, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

SENDING PRAYER

Let us pray. Lord God, in this time of holy worship you have refreshed us with your Word and given us new hope. You provide manna when we are hungry, and water to renew us. Send us forth now as witnesses of your Good News for all, that we may be light for the world, as we wait for Jesus, your Son and our Lord. **Amen.**

BLESSING

May the Lord bless you and keep you. Know that God is closest to you when you feel furthest away. May Christ's presence guide you in all you do. May the Holy Spirit shine in you and bring others closer to God's love and ✠ give you hope. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go and spread God's love as we prepare for the Messiah! **Thanks be to God**

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