



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Wilton, WI
Third Sunday of Advent
December 13, 2020
**Inviting People to
Journey with Christ's Family
In Spreading God's Love and Mercy**

"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.

Gathering
*The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God**

Comfort, Comfort Now My People



1 "Com - fort, com-fort now my peo - ple; tell of peace!" So says our God.
2 For the her - ald's voice is cry - ing in the des - ert far and near,
3 Straight shall be what long was crook - ed, and the rough - er plac - es plain.



Com-fort those who sit in dark - ness mourn-ing un - der sor - row's load.
call - ing us to true re - pen - tance, since the reign of God is here.
Let your hearts be true and hum - ble, as be - fits God's ho - ly reign.



To God's peo - ple now pro-claim that God's par - don waits for them!
Oh, that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way.
For the glo - ry of the Lord now on earth is shed a - broad,



Tell them that their war is o - ver; God will reign in peace for - ev - er.
Val - leys, rise to greet the Sav - ior; hills, bow down in hum - ble fa - vor.
and all flesh shall see the to - ken that God's word is nev - er bro - ken.

Text: Johann G. Olearius, 1635–1711; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–1878, alt.
Music: FREU DICH SEHR, *Trente quatre psaumes de David*, Geneva, 1551

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.

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.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Advent is the season that especially highlights the contrast between darkness and light. As the nights get longer, the days get shorter. This means that technically speaking, our days are filled more with night and less with daylight. Yet, in the Advent wreath, another candle is lit, rather than a candle taken away. Instead of experiencing more darkness, we experience more light!

Each Sunday, as a new Advent candle is lit, more light comes into the world. It represents the light of Christ. For each week we come closer to Christmas, and the day when we celebrate Christ's birth.

This Sunday we light the pink/rose candle in our Advent wreath. Unlike the first two candles which reflect on repentance, the pink candle celebrates the joy that comes to us through Christ! For this reason, it is sometimes called the "candle of joy."

While we know that Advent is a period of waiting that focuses on Christ's anticipated birth in the historical past, it is not exclusively about Christ's birth.

Advent also focuses on the future and on Christ's second coming!

May you celebrate today the joy that Christ's birth brings to the world. May you focus on the future and Christ's second coming. May you witness and give testimony to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one!

Peace,

Pastor Cathy

drive-in services, or no services at all, the expenses of the church need to be paid. Our household is no different than yours. As you look to making your charitable donations for 2020, please remember YOUR church.

As many of you are aware, Bud Osteboe was in an accident on Friday morning. He is recovering from a broken shoulder blade and 2 cracked ribs at Gunderson Hospital in La Crosse. The shoulder blade and ribs will heal in time, so Bud will need to rest for the next several weeks. With any luck, Bud will be discharged from the hospital later this week. His home address is: 21422 Mead Avenue, Wilton, 54670.

CONTACTS DURING CORONAVIRUS CLOSURE

In case of emergency, contact Pastor Cathleen, via text, 608-865-1074, or call Justin Arndt (608-435-6336) (414-587-6642) or Nalani Bever (608-387-2311).

To activate the prayer chain, please contact Nalani or Louise Buchholz (608-435-6435).

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*The Sunday Assembly, Lorraine S. Brugh, Gordon W. Lathrop, Augsburg Fortress, 2008
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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.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 126

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

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.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

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 word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL READING

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 gospel according to John 1:6-8, 19-28

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.

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

IN OUR PRAYERS

Katie Wallace, Carla Von Haden, Ruth Johnson, Judy Bever, Alrita Ornes, Lisa Rhodes, Pam Liefke, Frank Wendt, Jeff (Scott) DuCharme, Harvey Menn, Annette Udulutch, Jim Finer, Paul and Darlene Babbitt, Bud Osteboe

IN THE MILITARY

Jacob Picha, Todd Nofsinger, Dylan Dougherty, Seth Tormoen, Robert Cale

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We extend our prayers and sympathy to the family of Ron Koebernick who passed away earlier this week. The visitation will be held at St. Paul's on Saturday, December 19, from 9:00 AM—11:00 AM and will be followed by a gravesite service at St. Paul's Cemetery. Ron is the nephew of Ken Koebernick and the son of Sylvia Von Ruden.

We also lift the family of Tracy Schwartz in our prayers. Tracy passed away at the Elroy Nursing home on November 26. Tracy was the son of Calvin and Grace Schwartz.

Stop by and view the tree in front of church. It is especially beautiful at night. Should you run into Bob Birkholz be sure to thank him for donating the tree. A thank you is also due Jan Brandau, Tom Larson, Tim Welch, Maury Paeth, and Sid Thayer.

We did finish November financially with a positive balance for the month and, as a result of the chicken fundraiser, we entered December in pretty good shape, HOWEVER, the December offerings received to date are dismal. Regardless of whether we are holding in-house or

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. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit. Strengthen all who are in need of your loving care, including Katie Wallace, Carla Von Haden, Ruth Johnson, Judy Bever, Alrita Ornes, Lisa Rhodes, Pam Liefke, Frank Wendt, Jeff (Scott) DuCharme, Harvey Menn, Annette Udu-lutch, Jim Finer, Paul and Darlene Babbitt, and those we name aloud and in our hearts. 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.

Blessed Be the God of Israel

1 Blessed be the God of Is - ra - el who comes to set us free
 2 With prom - ised mer - cy will God still the cov - e - nant re - call,
 3 My child, as proph - et of the Lord you will pre - pare the way,

and rais - es up new hope for us: a Branch from Da - vid's tree.
 the oath once sworn to A - bra - ham, from foes to save us all;
 to tell God's peo - ple they are saved from sin's e - ter - nal sway.

So have the proph - ets long de - clared that with a might - y arm
 that we might wor - ship with - out fear and of - fer lives of praise,
 Then shall God's mer - cy from on high shine forth and nev - er cease

God would turn back our en - e - mies and all who wish us harm.
 in ho - li - ness and righ - teous - ness to serve God all our days.
 to drive a - way the gloom of death and lead us in - to peace.

Text: Carl P. Daw Jr., b. 1944, based on Luke 1:68-79
 Music: FOREST GREEN, English folk tune
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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

Our first reading for today, comes from the book of Isaiah. As we heard last week, Isaiah was a prophet of God who proclaimed God's word. Today, we hear God's word as recorded in Isaiah 61, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me..." We have heard these words in another reading from the season of Lent. The words are found in the gospel of Luke, chapter 4, verse 8. The context for the reading places Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth, where he is handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. After Jesus reads, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me...", he states (or proclaims), "Today

this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." It is a similar message that John proclaims when he announces the coming of the Messiah: Jesus Christ is the spirit. Jesus Christ is the anointed one.

Our gospel reading for today from the gospel of John, continues the story of the prophet, John, that began last week. In the gospel of John, the prophet, John, is not identified as John the Baptist. Perhaps this is because the focus of this reading is not to be on John or John's baptizing, but on John as a witness for Jesus! John is not proclaiming himself or his virtues. John is not building himself up. Rather, John is testifying to the spirit; to the one who can truly say, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me..." John is not the spirit. John is not the Messiah. John is the messenger. John is the one who is proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the anointed one.

The term, "witness," may make us think of jury trials and those who present information about an accused person. The term may also remind us of a "character witness," who speaks about another person's virtues and failings. Witnesses are expected to provide accurate information about someone who is not known, or not as well known, to others who will make a decision about the person. While this reading is not in the context of a trial, the delegation is questioning John. John is both a prophet, and a witness to God's word. John is both

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.

God of preachers and messengers, you have entrusted your church with the work of proclaiming good news. Strengthen the leadership of Rev. Wm. Chris Boerger who will be serving the La Crosse Area Synod as Interim Bishop in the new year, and his successor who will be elected at the 2021 Synod Assembly. Strengthen the witness of all other 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.

liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor..." (Isaiah 61:1-2a) Our faith in God does not mean that we will live lives free from challenges, illnesses, and tragedies, but it does mean that God is with us all the time! We too, proclaim the coming of Christ, because we too are witnesses for Christ and all that God has done in us and through us throughout our lives. We share the good news of God's forgiveness. We share the good news of God's grace. And we share the good news of God's gift of salvation, as our hearts overflow with the love of God. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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.**

a messenger, and the one who gives testimony to Jesus as the Messiah!

In our gospel passage, the delegation sent by the Pharisees asks John, "Who are you?" They are asking John to testify. They are asking John to give his testimony. John "confessed, I am not the Messiah." But the delegation members want to know more. They are persistent. They want to know--is he Elijah, is he the prophet? John tries to redirect their questions away from himself. John takes them to be asking, "Are you the Messiah?" He responds that he is not the one; he is not the Messiah. He proclaims that the one to come they "do not know." The one to come "is coming after me," and he (John) is "not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal."

Throughout this passage, John keeps trying to deflect the attention away from himself. But the delegation keeps looking to him, perhaps hearing, or not hearing, what John is saying. They are looking to John, not to the spirit. They are looking to John, not to the Messiah, the light that is to come! But John continues to be God's messenger. John continues to proclaim the Messiah. John continues to testify to the spirit, the Messiah, the anointed one!

Last week in my sermon, I mentioned visiting with the grandmother of the bride at a wedding reception. She spoke about her life, especially the challenges, illnesses, and tragedies. But after each story, she proclaimed, "God was with me all the time." It did not occur to me then, but what she was doing was

giving her testimony! She was sharing what had happened in her life, but she was talking less about herself and more about God! She was proclaiming what God had done for her, as God walked along side her throughout her many years of life! She was witnessing about God's presence, witnessing about who God is, and witnessing about what God means to her and to the world!

Perhaps you have known persons who have seen or experienced horrible things that have encouraged them to testify about God's work in their lives. Perhaps they experienced the atrocities of war, dictatorial power, apartheid, or some other injustice. Their proximity to the atrocities encouraged them to be advocates for justice and peace, and to educate others. They gave their testimonies, describing what they had seen, heard, or otherwise experienced.

Many immigrants are able to give testimonies like this. They have experienced atrocities first-hand. Some of our own ancestors experienced oppression and injustices that brought them to the United States. Many of them knew hardship. Many of them knew about oppression and injustice first-hand. Many of them testified to God's work in their lives and witnessed to others about God's saving grace!

Have you thought about how God has walked along side you during your life? As Christians, we may think that our faith in God means that we will only know happiness and a life filled with goodness and joy. But the Bible

does not say that those who believe in God will only know blessings. The Bible does not say that those who are faithful to God will have lives filled with only good things. Having faith in God means that as we walk through the challenges, illnesses, and tragedies of life, we do not walk alone; God walks with us! For God is with us, especially in our great times of need. In the words of Romans 5:3-5, "...[W]e also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

What would you say, today, if I asked you to give your testimony? How has God worked in your life, even in the hardest of times? How has God walked with you during this time of the pandemic? How is God continuing to work in your life at this time? When we witness to God's work in us and through us, when we place our emphasis on God's will, not our own will; we recognize the Holy Spirit working within us. When we point to the spirit, not to ourselves, we too proclaim Jesus Christ, the anointed one, the Messiah.

As we walk through the darkness of the Advent season, may we see the light that is to come: Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one. For Jesus is the spirit who comes into this broken world. Christ is the one who proclaims the good news "to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim