

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church
Sunday, December 13, 2020
Third Sunday of Advent

Introduction to the day

“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

Lighting the Advent Wreath

Use this blessing when lighting three candles.

P: Holy are you, God of the brokenhearted and oppressed; you promised to send your chosen one who gives a garland instead of ashes to those who mourn; who brings down the powerful and lifts the lowly.

And we light these candles,

open our lips to testify to the true light coming into the world who enlightens everyone.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the desert.

Reveal your truth to us, and fill our mouths with shouts of joy that declare the great things you have done for us.

C: Amen.

Light Three Candles sing

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.*

-- History of Little Town of Bethlehem--

GATHERING SONG *Little Town of Bethlehem* (ELW 279)

1 O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

2 For Christ is born of Mary, and, gathered all above
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the king, and peace to all the earth!

3 How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming; but, in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

4 O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!

GREETING

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

C: And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: Let us pray.

C: 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.

The assembly is seated.

WORD

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

FIRST READING: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

L: A reading from Isaiah.

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.

L: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

PSALM 126 read responsively

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

L: A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

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.

L: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia. Alleluia.

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

P: The holy gospel according to John.

C: 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.

P: The gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Silence for meditation

HYMN OF THE DAY (ELW 248)

1 People, look east. The time is near of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east, and sing today--Love, the Guest, is on the way.

2 Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare, one more seed is planted there.
Give up your strength the seed to nourish, that in course the flow'r may flourish.
People, look east, and sing today-- Love, the Rose, is on the way.

3 Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim, one more light the bowl shall brim,
shining beyond the frosty weather, bright as sun and moon together.
People, look east, and sing today-- Love, the Star, is on the way.

4 Angels announce with shouts of mirth him who brings new life to earth.
Set ev'ry peak and valley humming with the word, the Lord is coming.
People, look east, and sing today--Love, the Lord, is on the way.

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

A: 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.

A: 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.

C: Your mercy is great.

A: 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.

C: Your mercy is great.

A: 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.

C: Your mercy is great.

A: 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.

C: Your mercy is great.

A: 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.

C: Your mercy is great.

A: 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.

C: Your mercy is great.

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

C: Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

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

P: 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

Postlude

Sight and Sound offering a Christmas Special



Voices of Christmas will be offered on December 18 at 7:00 p.m. \$15.
Total running time 80 minutes. Internet connection required.

Announcements

Remember in prayer: Rowen Aldridge, Betty and Jim Allen, Luke Antolick, Mary Bower, Bob Braucht, Cindy Cummings, Dawn Hauser, Dave Kuehl at Encompass Health, Ralph Lehman, Sara Leighow, Caleb Leone, Ruth Lupold, David Mitchell, Bob and Phyllis Moriarity, Kathy Neal, Rev. Donald and Ruth Nice, Jack Rishel, Joann Rishel, Ben Saar, Jane Shaffer, Rev. Gary Shumway, John Truax, Jillian Waldman, and all of our shut-ins; the safety of our military troops around the world (Mark Baier, Jade Cordrey, Paul Laidacker, Kenny Leitch, Maddison Myers, Tyler O'Neal, Adam Shaffer, Aaron Stabley, Paul St. James, Jenna White); Everyone affected by the fires on the West Coast; Family Promise and the homeless in our counties. Bishop Eaton, our Presiding Bishop; and Bishop Collins, Bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. For our Companion Synod in Liberia and Ansbach-Wurzburg, Germany; our sister church, St. Wunibald in Heidenheim, Germany and for the New Love Center as it seeks to build a new food hub.

Bible Study - Due to the pandemic we are suspending Bible study. Please continue studying the Advent study: *A Wonderful Life* that we handed out earlier.

The Lutheran Church **Women's Prayer Chain** is a vital ministry of St. John Lutheran. Anyone in need of prayers is asked to contact any of the following persons:

Gloria Ely – 570-873-3597
Sarah Davidson - 570-398-0659
Joyce Braucht - 570-398-2852

Giving Plus+ Download the “Giving Plus+” app from your app store for your cell phone. This feature is also available on our web site. Enter your email, make up a password, and walk through the choices to give the church an electronic donation by check or debit/credit card. People were asking if they could give electronically by debit/credit card. Now this feature is available. If you have any questions, contact Pastor Aucker.

Give+ Text: Simply send a text message to 570-865-1101 with the amount you would like to contribute. Within a few minutes, you'll be sent a text with a link to register. Click on the link and enter your cardholder name and credit or debit card information. Once your registration is complete, you will receive a text verification and a receipt of your donation via email.

“Grab-a-Tab” - The youth of St. John would like to ask for donations of little tabs from beverage, soup and dessert cans. It doesn't matter what color the tab, just grab them and deliver them to the church office. This project will benefit the Ronald McDonald House of Danville. “Grab-a-Tab” program allows people of all ages to join in the effort of providing a “Home-away-from-Home” to children with cancer or other serious illnesses and their families.

Christmas in Bethlehem

Restrictions are a bit different in the West Bank, which means there are plans for a small (45 person) worship service on Christmas Eve at the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church near Manger Square. This is an annual event, held in German, English, and Arabic, and typically attended by several hundred people, both local and international. Of course we're all very sad that things won't feel the same. Here's the GOOD NEWS: we will be live-streaming the service for all to watch! The service will take place on 24 December 24 at 10:00 a.m.

THIS WEEK'S EVENTS

Sunday, December 13, 2020

Third Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Worship Service on Facebook

7:00 p.m. AA meeting

Tuesday, December 14, 2020

PB&J Day

7:30 p.m. A.A. and N. A. meetings

Wednesday, December 15, 2020

10:00 a.m. Prayer/Communion at Trinity Episcopal

Sunday, December 20, 2020

Fourth Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Worship Service on Facebook

7:00 p.m. AA meeting