

DECEMBER 6, 2020

ADVENT TWO

*Welcome to our service of Holy Eucharist. All are welcome, we are glad that you are here. The people are invited to join in everything that is in **BOLD** type, while the Celebrant will speak the plain type.*

## LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES

First Reader: On this second Sunday of Advent,  
as we think about the coming of Jesus Christ,  
we light the candle of peace.

Second Reader: Jesus Christ is our peace.  
He is the Prince of Peace,  
and the fruit of His presence is peace.

First Reader: Christ comes to bring justice, wholeness, and harmony  
to every relationship throughout all creation.

**Jesus, we pray,  
guide our feet into the path of peace.**

## COLLECT OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

God of justice,  
**clear our lives of hatred and despair  
and sow in us seeds of joy and peace;  
so that shoots of hope may spring forth in us  
as we await the coming of the Christ,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit,  
lives and reigns, one God,  
now and for ever. Amen.**

# THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

*The people sit.*

First Reading: A reading from the Prophet Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup> Speak 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.

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every 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.

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

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

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

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

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

<sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;<sup>[a]</sup>

lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,<sup>[b]</sup>  
lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup> See, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

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

### **PSALM 85:1-2, 8-13**

- 1 You have been gracious to your land, O God,\*  
you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.
- 2 You have forgiven the iniquity of your people\*  
and blotted out all their sins.**
- 8 I will listen to what you are saying,\*  
for you are speaking peace to your faithful people  
and to those who turn their hearts to you.
- 9 Truly, your salvation is very near to those who fear you,\*  
that your glory may dwell in our land.**
- 10 Mercy and truth have met together;\*  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
- 11 Truth shall spring up from the earth,\*  
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.**
- 13 Righteousness shall go before you,\*  
and peace shall be a pathway for your feet.

**Glory to God our Creator, to God's most Holy Word,  
and to the Spirit, indwelling:\***  
**as it was in the beginning, is now and will be for ever. Amen.**

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

The Holy Gospel according to Mark 1:1-8 **Glory to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

**1** The beginning of the good news<sup>[a]</sup> of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,<sup>[c]</sup>

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,<sup>[d]</sup>  
who will prepare your way;  
<sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight,’”

<sup>4</sup> John the baptizer appeared<sup>[e]</sup> in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And 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. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He 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. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with<sup>[f]</sup> water; but he will baptize you with<sup>[g]</sup> the Holy Spirit.”

The Gospel of Christ.

**Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ**

*The people sit.*

SERMON

This is not just Advent, this is our Advent! Yours and mine. This month, as we anticipate the coming of God in human flesh, we are alerted to something that is coming. In fact, we ourselves are coming into a new place. We are anticipating change, transformation, growth and mission. This momentous event was prophesized long ago, when Isaiah proclaimed,  
“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every 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.

<sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

But it is not just an event for history, it is an event happening right here, right now.

Just as the coming of Jesus Christ marked something very new, so too do these opening versus of Mark’s gospel. Scholars believe that Mark was the first gospel written, probably around the year 70. Remembering Isaiah, John the Baptist is preparing the way in the wilderness, by baptizing people for the forgiveness of sins. He proclaims that one is coming who is more powerful than he, who will baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is coming in to human history. Interestingly, this is the first time the word Gospel is used; Mark is indeed

preparing for us the beginning of the Gospel era. And in the Gospel era, the kingdom of God has dawned; but before Jesus there was John, and before John there was Isaiah.

We are introduced to John the Baptist as an apocalyptic, and unique character. He lives in the wilderness, a place for outcasts, "clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey." We may think him an unlikely character to be paving the way for Jesus Christ, except that he is of course a solid link to the Old Testament prophets Malachi, who claimed, "a messenger of God will go ahead of you," Isaiah, "who will prepare the way of the Lord & makes his paths straight," and Elijah, whose appearance is described in a very similar way. With John we have thus arrived in a time of anticipation and fulfillment. John's baptisms will take place at the Jordan River, famous in the Old Testament as the boundary marker for what came to be called "the Promised Land." The time of promise is drawing to a close and the time of fulfillment is drawing near.

John is promising to all who come, "from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem," that they may be baptized, repent and be forgiven. Just as the Hebrew people crossed the banks of the Jordan into salvation and the promised land, John speaks of one greater than himself, who will come and baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit. For us, "The annual recurrence of the advent season invites us to expect not only some far off event, but also to expect that the one who came into Galilee preaching a kingdom near at hand may come to baptize us with the Holy Spirit this year, soon, now."

And this baptism will be coupled with repentance and forgiveness. In Greek, repentance means to change one's mind, and in Hebrew it means to change one's heart, will and conduct. In fact, repentance is a means to preparing the way for the Lord's coming. Just as God once prepared the Hebrew people to enter the promised land, this baptism, coupled with repentance and forgiveness, is the way to prepare for Jesus Christ. One scholar writes, "That is why the text can still encounter every hearer in the emptiness of their own wilderness, why the voice of a rough and roaring prophet can still call the hearer to turn around, accept the greater baptism offered by a risen lord, and thus experience his coming as a powerful, personal advent." God is coming to find us; God will always find us.

As baptized people, we are called to announce and make known God's Son in this season of Advent. Like the witness of John, we too are witnesses to the one who incarnates "the beginning of the good news, the gospel". The Venerable Bede, the English Benedictine monk of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, wrote, "Whoever preaches right faith and good works, prepares nothing other than the road for the Lord to come in to the hearers hearts so that this gracious power might penetrate and the light of truth illumine them. Thus may he make straight paths for God, while he forms pure thoughts in the soul by the word of good preaching."

I have to say that it is rather exciting to think that I could do such a thing. "Prepare the road for the Lord...make straight paths for God!" I love the words here of St. Teresa of Avila, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Carmelite nun, who wrote:

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours

are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

Let us all enjoy the adventure of journeying to a new place now, as we anticipate the coming of God in Jesus Christ, not as a one-time event that happened long ago, but as a moment that happens in every time, on every day, in every heart. We are changing, anticipating, and growing. We, like John, are the preparers of the road, the witness of repentance and forgiveness through our baptism, set in place by John so many years ago.  
Amen.

## AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We are called to proclaim the truth and let us believe:

It is not true that this world and its people are doomed to die and to be lost.

**This is true: I have come that they may have life  
in all its abundance.**

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction.

**This is true: The deaf hear, the dead are raised to life,  
the poor are hearing the good news.**

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word and that war and destruction have come to stay forever.

**This is true: Death shall be no more,  
neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more.**

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world.

**This is true: The Lord whom we seek  
will suddenly come to the temple;  
and the Lord is like a refining fire.**

It is not true that our dreams of liberation, of human dignity, are not meant for this earth and for this history.

**This is true: It is already time for us to wake from sleep.  
For the night is far gone, the day is at hand.**

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

### THE PEACE

*The people stand.*

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

### PRAYER OVER THE GIFTS

Let us pray:

God of abundance,

**we bring before you**

**the precious fruits of your creation,**

**and with them our very lives.**

**Teach us patience and hope as we care for all those in need**

**until the coming of your Son, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.**

### EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Blessed are you, gracious God . . .

. . . to proclaim the glory of your name:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of Power and Might**

**Heaven and Earth are Full of Your Glory,**

**Hosanna in the Highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord**

**Hosanna in the Highest.**

We give thanks to you, Lord our God . . .

...therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**Christ has died**

**Christ has risen**

**Christ will come again**

And we offer our sacrifice . . .

...now and for ever. **Amen**

## LORD'S PRAYER

As our Saviour taught us, let us pray,  
**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.**

## BREAKING OF THE BREAD

God of Promise,  
you prepare a banquet for us in your kingdom.  
**Happy are those who are called  
to the supper of the Lamb.**

The gifts of God for the people of God.  
**Thanks be to God.**

## THE COMMUNION

*The Table is ready and all are welcome*

## THE PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

*The people stand.*

Let us pray

God for whom we wait,  
**in this meal you give us a foretaste of that day  
when the hungry will be fed with good things.  
Send us forth to make known your deeds  
and to proclaim the greatness of your name,  
through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.**

Glory to God,  
**whose power, working in us,  
can do infinitely more  
than we can ask or imagine.**

**Glory to God from generation to generation,  
in the church in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever. Amen.**

## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

## PRIEST'S BLESSING

Be steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and untiring in love all the days of your life; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

## SENDING OUT

Let us bless the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**