

Home Service for December 4, 2022

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

A righteous branch grows out of the root of Jess; a branch that brings justice and peace. Let us prepare our hearts to receive the blessings of this branch in our lives and in our world.

Call to Worship:

The prophet Isaiah declared that justice and peace shall come through the family of Jesse. This justice shall be for all of creation. Peace shall be established in all the world. Get ready! Prepare for God's peace to reign! Blessed be God who does such wondrous things! We give thanks to God for this time of healing and hope.
AMEN.

Opening Prayer:

Patient and loving God, we so easily launch ourselves in preparation for the secular festival of giving and parties and the swirl of social events; but we forget that the true preparation is the readiness of our hearts to receive you. Help us look again at our lives and turn them around so that they may be in tune with your will. We ask this in Jesus' Name, AMEN.

Prayer of Confession:

Lord of mercy and peace, open our hearts to receive your words of hope. We live far too much in darkness and fear. We have let the fears invade the very center of our lives and find ourselves changing, moving from your light to the darkness of despair. It seems that this world and its people are more pleased to fight and destroy than they are to have peace and harmony. We become part of that crowd when we wallow in anger, resentment, apathy, and greed. Forgive us, patient and merciful God. Help us be people who will look at the ways in which we have blocked your presence; ways in which we have truly failed to be your people. Give us courage and strength to change our lives, that your peace may become a reality in this world, right now, this day. For we offer this prayer in the name of Jesus.
AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Though the darkness seems so deep, do not fear. God is with us. Repent! Turn your lives to God. God's love is being poured out for you, always. AMEN

Read Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.

² May he judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.

³ May the mountains bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.

⁴ May he defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
may he crush the oppressor.

⁵ May he endure^[a] as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.

⁶ May he be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.

⁷ In his days may the righteous flourish
and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.

¹⁸ Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel,
who alone does marvelous deeds.

¹⁹ Praise be to his glorious name forever;
may the whole earth be filled with his glory.

Amen and Amen.

Prayers of the People:

God of Advent waiting and watching, we have come to you this day with hearts heavy, with concerns for family and friends; for world situations; for struggles in home, community, state, and nation. We feel powerless to affect any changes. So we withdraw into ourselves, quick to criticize and slow to change our own behavior. Today you have called us to prepare ourselves to receive this "shoot" which shall arise from the stump of Jesse. You remind us that this is the one who will bring messages of peace. He will help us to become faithful disciples and servants. But we have much work to do. Our preparation needs to focus on our own attitudes and actions. We need to clean our spiritual houses of the cobwebs of hate, greed, apathy, suspicion. We need to focus more on your absolute love and

forgiveness. As we turn our lives to you, offering names and situations in prayers for your healing mercies, help us to remember that our own healing is vital. Enable us to be strong and confident workers for you in this world. 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

Read the Lesson: Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—
³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
⁵Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
⁶The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling^[a] together;
and a little child will lead them.
⁷The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
⁸The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
⁹They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,

for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 15:4-13

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews^[a] on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed ⁹ and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;
I will sing the praises of your name.”^[b]

¹⁰ Again, it says,

“Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.”^[c]

¹¹ And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;
let all the peoples extol him.”^[d]

¹² And again, Isaiah says,

“The Root of Jesse will spring up,
one who will arise to rule over the nations;
in him the Gentiles will hope.”^[e]

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea ² and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”^[a]

⁴ John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ "I baptize you with^[b] water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with^[c] the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Message

We are one week closer to the coming of Christ at Christmas. During the last week, we probably made more preparations in getting ready to celebrate that special day and time. Sometimes in this world, we become too busy with the preparations for family and friends or for the things of this world. We may need especially at this time to sit back and to consider how we are to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord.

On this Second Sunday in Advent, we encounter one of the most interesting and dynamic characters, outside of Jesus, in all of the New Testament. His name is John. John was related to Jesus and was born for a very specific purpose. John's life purpose was to prepare the way for the Lord: in the hearts of the believers that were there and people who would come. John had a simple message. He was a wilderness preacher. He didn't go into the cities to preach, but he stood outside the cities and preached: Prepare the way for the Lord. We are told in verse 5: "People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan."

John was known as the Baptizer, because it was a way to describe the significance of his unique ministry. John was called by God to herald and call people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, the Son of God. Not only was John's ministry unique, he was unique. He could have followed in his father's footsteps, and become a priest, and use that position to call people to prepare for God's coming

among us in the person of Jesus the Christ. But he didn't. He left his home, striking out on his own to seek a restless urge within him, leading him to find peace with his soul. The beat that pounded in John's heart was the call of God. Nevertheless, John wound up in the wilderness, dressed in a garment of camel's hair, and subsiding on a diet of locust and wild honey. And we might conclude that his hair was long and stringy, with a beard to match. John was a rough wilderness person, weathered and stern. And his message was as stern as he was. "Repent of your sins, and prepare the way of the Lord, for God's kingdom is coming among us." He called a spade a spade. The Gospels tell us that in spite of his lack of tact, the people from all the regions left the comfort of their homes and traveled out in the wilderness to hear him preach, repent of their sins, and have their sins be cleansed by baptism.

John preached the message of repentance: a change of mind, a change of thinking, and a change of heart that would lead to a change of living. Matthew's Gospel raises a couple of troubling aspects of John's message for us to consider. When the Pharisees and Sadducees, those who lived their lives striving to keep the commandments and live a life of faith, came to hear John preach and seek his baptism of repentance, John rebuked them. Think, here were men who worshiped God on a regular basis, and truly strived to live according to God's will, persons not unlike ourselves, who gather here to worship God. And yet, John calls them a brood of vipers, snakes, those who would want to poison and obstruct the message of the Messiah. It is as if they only wanted to have their skins washed, not their hearts and minds.

What did John know? Verse 8: "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." He said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "I don't know what is in your hearts; but I can see what is in your lives". Repentance is a change of thinking, change of mind, change of heart and a change of life. If lives are not changed, the hearts have not changed either. The thinking hasn't changed. These leaders of the church still trusted in the law. In fact for them if they did not keep the law, they would be separated forever from God.

There is a past, future and present tense to this message of Advent. Even today, John the Baptizer is calling on us, as he did the people of his day, to prepare for the coming of the Christ and the kingdom of God. And although his message is one that is grounded in history, calling the people of his day to prepare, and look forward to the beginning of Christ's ministry, it calls them to act in the present moment of their lives with repentance. When we bring John's message into our present moment, to learn from the past as we look forward to the future, we must

realize that we, like those who were the religious faithful of the past, cannot escape John's call to repentance. We must realize, that in the eyes of God, none of us have totally lived our lives as God would have us live, and that we, although we are, active members of Christ's Church, still need to repent, and daily renew the promise of our baptism.

John tells us, that unlike his baptism of repentance, Jesus will baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Throughout Holy Scripture, fire is the one reliable sign of the presence of God. God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. A pillar of fire guided the people of Israel through the wilderness after their escape from Egypt. It is the fire of transformation, a fire that both lights us up and changes us, melting us down and reforming us more nearly to the image of God. It is the fire with which Jesus himself baptizes us, inviting us into a bright relationship with him.

The point of my message this morning is not just that John was a very unique individual, chosen by God to prepare the people years ago to hear his message, but that we today should repent and prepare to receive the Son of God into our lives. His message, as rough as it was, still speaks to us today. His message is not just a message of doom for those who fail to heed his call of repentance and come to faith in Jesus as the Christ, it is also a call for those of us who do embrace Jesus as the Christ, to be purged by the fire of reformation that Jesus inaugurated with his ministry, that we might become his disciples, and instruments of his ongoing compassion for those in need. I look to the image of fire as the means by which I am molded and shaped into the image of God that Jesus the Christ has modeled for me to emulate.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, God of the prophets, you sent your messenger into the Jordan wilderness to prepare human hearts for the coming of your Son. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to prepare for Christ's coming into our presence, that we might hear the good news of your saving grace, repent of our sins, and transform our lives to be witnesses to your redeeming grace. This we ask in Christ's Holy name. Amen.

Benediction:

Prepare for the coming of the Lord! Make way in your hearts for love! Get rid of all anger and fear, for God is about to bring incredible light to the world! Go in peace and confidence as witnesses to God's love. AMEN