

Second Sunday of Advent

December 5, 2021

Introduction



Forerunners and messengers advance the advent of our God. While John the baptizer's voice in the wilderness may be the principal focus of the day, Malachi's prophecy could as easily herald the coming Christ as forerunner of the LORD of hosts. Finally all the baptized are called to participate in the sharing of the gospel. In so doing we prepare the way for the coming of Jesus and assist all people in capturing a vision of the "salvation of God."

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit, who alone does wonders, who lifts up the lowly, who fills the hungry with good things. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin, trusting in the tender mercy of our God.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God for whom we wait,

in the presence of one another, we confess our sin before you.

We fail in believing that your good news is for us.

We falter in our call to tend your creation.

We find our sense of self in material wealth.

We fear those different from ourselves.

We forget that we are your children and turn away from your love.

Forgive us, Blessed One, and assure us again of your saving grace. Amen.

God, in Christ Jesus, has looked with favor upon you!

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, ✝ your sins are forgiven.

You are children of the Most High,

inheritors of the eternal promise, and recipients of divine mercy.

God strengthens you anew to follow the way of peace. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn ELW # 257 (vs 3-4)/ LBW # 34 (vs 1 & 3)

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming give to all the people of the world knowledge of your salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Malachi 3:1-4

God announces a covenant with Israel. A messenger like Malachi (his name means “my messenger”) will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord by purifying and refining God’s people, as silver and gold are refined.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Psalm: Luke 1:68-79

⁶⁸Blessed are you, Lord, the God of Israel, you have come to your people and set them free.

⁶⁹**You have raised up for us a mighty Savior, born of the house of your servant David.**

⁷⁰Through your holy prophets, you promised of old to save us from our enemies,

⁷¹from the hands of all who hate us,

⁷²**to show mercy to our forebears, and to remember your holy covenant.**

⁷³This was the oath you swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

free to worship you without fear, ⁷⁵holy and righteous before you, all the days of our life.

⁷⁶And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,

for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way,

⁷⁷**to give God’s people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.**

⁷⁸In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

⁷⁹**to shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death,**

and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Second Reading: Philippians 1:3-11

The apostle Paul was the pastor of many new churches. He writes in this letter about his joy to be in partnership with the Christians of Philippi. Listen to how tender-hearted Paul, sometimes a stern preacher, is with his friends as he encourages them to grow in love and knowledge.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

John the Baptist is a herald of Jesus, whose way is prepared by “repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” As we hear the careful record of human leaders, we sense the spectrum of political and religious authority that will be challenged by this coming Lord.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

One of the bedrooms in our house needs repainting. Ideally it should have been repainted before we moved in, but we ran out of time before the day of the move, so here we are four years later, and the room is still unpainted. The process of painting the room really wouldn’t be that big of a deal. It’s not a huge room.

My guess is if we paint it blue again and buy decent paint, it will only take one coat. The walls could easily be painted in less than an hour. But if you've ever done any painting, you know that painting a room - and especially painting a bedroom that already has furniture in it - requires more than simply grabbing a brush and paint.

No, to do the job well, I would need to move the furniture away from the walls, I'd need to cover the carpet, and tape up the trim around the windows and the door frames to mask the fact that I'm not always the neatest painter in the world.

The painting itself is not much of a problem, but the preparation to get to the point where I could actually paint well would require far more work than the painting itself. Now as you might guess with Christmas right around the corner and the child who inhabits that bedroom coming home from college soon, I don't have the time or the energy to do all the preparation work needed to paint the bedroom properly.

Even though I won't be prepping to paint anytime soon our reading from the Gospel of Luke reminds me that I as a follower of Jesus I still have a great deal of prep work to do, for as John the Baptist's ministry and message demonstrates, there is important prep work to be done in our hearts and in the world before the coming of Jesus.

Prepare the way of the Lord. That's the ministry John is doing with the crowd of people who have gathered around him in the wilderness looking for hope, seeking a Messiah.

Prepare the way of the Lord. That's the message of John's ministry to all of us who gather together as followers of Jesus as the body of Christ.

Prepare the way for Jesus to come. Make the path straight. Unlock the doors that are closed. Smooth out the rough edges to help clear a path for Jesus' mission to love, bless, and save the world to move forward boldly into our hearts, into our communities, into the brokenness of our systems and relationships.

Now to be sure, this close to Christmas. It's easy to hear prepare and think OK, Christmas is coming so I need to decorate. I need to buy presents, to put up a Christmas tree and get ready for Christmas morning, but John's call to prepare, as you know, goes far beyond preparing for Christmas on December 25, 2021.

John's call to prepare the way is a much broader appeal that encourages us to prepare both for Christ's coming at Christmas and for Christ's promised return someday. And while the crowd's gathered around John 2000 years ago were clearly being instructed to repent and prepare for ministry of Jesus which was about to begin in their community, for you and for me, I think the call to prepare the way is an invitation to prepare ourselves for Jesus' coming and to help prepare others to know God's love in their lives.

Now even though the words from Isaiah quoted in our reading from Luke speak of preparing the way of the Lord by making paths straight; by filling valleys and making mountains low; the work John is describing doesn't necessarily require bulldozers and heavy equipment.

No - the preparation we are called to do requires us to look first at our hearts, to look at our lives, to consider our priorities, and discover how our lives are shaped - or could be shaped - by Jesus' presence with us. And not only that, but to invest in our communities, in building relationships,

and listening so we might hear how we can accompany others in preparing to encounter or experience the transformational love of Jesus.

And while neither John or Jesus provide us with a check list of “12 Steps to Prepare for Christ’s Coming,” in our affirmation our baptism service, we lift up five areas of response to God’s gift of love that seem like a pretty helpful starting point for me as we think about how we can prepare ourselves and prepare the world around us to experience the love of God in Jesus.

If you don’t remember those five promises and our response, we ask: “Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism:

- to live among God's faithful people,
- to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper,
- to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
- to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
- and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?”

And we respond: “I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.” (ELW, pg. 236)

As I said, we don’t have a check list, but it seems to me that these promises are a pretty good place to start if we want to making the path straight in our hearts and in our community for Jesus. Think about it as we live among God's faithful people, as we intentionally gather with other Christians, digitally or in-person, for fellowship, support, and learning, we prepare for Christ’s coming by connecting to the body of Christ more fully as we hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper.

As we gather for worship to give praise to God and hear God’s Word proclaimed. As we are fed and nourished by Christ’s body and blood, we prepare for Christ’s coming by experiencing God’s promise of forgiveness and new life through Jesus.

As we proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; as we share what we believe with others; as we allow our actions and our choices to be shaped by our faith; as we share our stories of faith with our neighbors and friends, we prepare for Christ’s coming by opening the door for someone else to discover the hope and help that comes through a relationship with God.

As we serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus; as we care for those who are sick or ill; as we show kindness and compassion, as we invest our talents in resources in supporting God’s mission; we prepare for Christ’s coming by helping others to experience the good news of God’s saving love.

And as we strive for justice and peace in all the earth; as we walk with people whose voice is being drowned out by oppression, racism, or greed; as we amplify the voices of those who speak truth; as we seek to find peaceful solutions to conflicts; as we pray for healing and wholeness for the brokenness of the world, we prepare for Christ’s coming by offering a glimpse of God’s kingdom where all are equal in God’s sight.

Now as I like to remind people, you won’t be able to fulfill all five of these promises perfectly every day, so don’t worry about being perfect, strive for progress, not perfection, and remember that each of us, regardless of our faults or imperfections, has a part to play in this ministry John sets in motion to prepare the way of the Lord.

And to be sure, the preparation John is calling us to do will take a little work. It will take a little effort - but just as the work that goes into preparing to paint a room will help yield beautiful results, so too, will the preparation John is inviting us to do yield beautiful results in our hearts and in the world. For when we prepare for Christ's coming, by growing in our relationship with God and by sharing the joy of God's love with others, then we and all those around us can experience more fully the hope and help that comes from knowing Jesus' love.

Hymn of the Day ELW # 264/LBW # 26

Prepare the Royal Highway

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Nicene Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all people and places that yearn for God's presence.

A brief silence.

You send messengers into the world to proclaim the day of your coming. Make our bishops, pastors, deacons, and lay preachers confident in their preaching, that their words and our lives witness to your grace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Send your Spirit to all living creatures that are endangered. Provide them with shelter and care, and bring us into right relationship with the earth that you create and call good. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Send leaders to our nations, cities, schools, and businesses to work on behalf of those who have lost parents, spouses, and loved ones; immigrants; the imprisoned; those living in poverty; and all who are oppressed. Make them bold in their commitments to justice and reconciliation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Send your servants to care for those who suffer. Use our ministries and our lives to reach out with compassion to those who are hungry, oppressed, lonely, or ill (*especially those we name now*). Grant them healing and wholeness. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Send prophets to speak difficult truths, even when they are poorly received. Embolden those who ask hard questions and challenge accepted ways. Instill in youth and elders alike a passion for pointing to Jesus in all things. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We remember your saints, both those publicly celebrated and those more humbly remembered. Confident that your work will be completed, we live in faith until the day of your coming. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of new life, you come among us in the places we least expect. Receive these prayers and those of our hearts, in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**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.

Closing Hymn ELW # 239/LBW # 35

Hark, the Glad Sound!

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Worship adapted from sundaysandseasons.com. Copyright © 2021 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.

Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #SAS027356.

Today's reflection was written by the Rev. John Wertz, Jr. Assistant to the Bishop of the Virginia Synod.