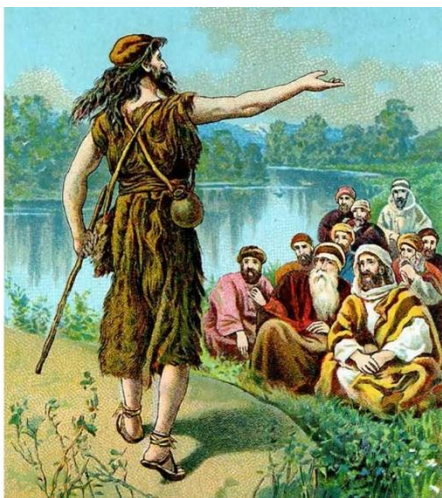


**DECEMBER 12, 2021 10 AM
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**



**St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL
397-6323**

Rev. Rosemary Captain

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Rejoice, give thanks; come home to God's house!
The Holy One is in our midst.

**How good it is to come home to God's house!
How good it is to gather in Christ's presence!**

Sing aloud! Exult with all your heart; the Sovereign One has done glorious things.

We offer up our anxieties, seeking God's peace.

We face our plenty, eager to share.

Shout your praise! Express your joy!

The God of our salvation welcomes us.

God's love is renewing us in these moments;

God's strength is becoming our song!

***UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

God of our baptism, renew in us today the gifts of your Holy Spirit and fire. We have come together, eager for good news. We are here for instructions, ready to do the work you call us to do in the world. Equip us in this time of worship to draw deeply from the waters of salvation. Fill us with your love that we may pass it on. Recall us to truth and excellence and justice in all we say and do. Amen.

***GLORIA: NCH 759**

Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three- in-One; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

EPISTLE READING: Philippians 4:4-7

⁴ Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! ⁵ Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people.

The Lord is near. ⁶ Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. ⁷ Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

***GOSPEL READING: Luke 3:7-18**

⁷ Then John said to the crowds who came to be baptized by him, "You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? ⁸ Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. And don't even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham's children from these stones. ⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire."

¹⁰ The crowds asked him, "What then should we do?"

¹¹ He answered, "Whoever has two shirts must share with the one who has none, and whoever has food must do the same."

¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized.

They said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?"

¹³ He replied, "Collect no more than you are authorized to collect."

¹⁴ Soldiers asked, "What about us? What should we do?"

He answered, "Don't cheat or harass anyone, and be satisfied with your pay."

¹⁵ The people were filled with expectation, and everyone wondered whether John might be the Christ. ¹⁶ John replied to them all, "I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming. I'm not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out." ¹⁸ With many other words John appealed to them, proclaiming good news to the people.

Hear the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "What can we learn from John?"

Let us pray: God of life and love, whose good news often comes in strange packages, open our eyes and ears to see and hear your message. Open our hearts to embrace one another in our caring. Help us to share generously and to receive graciously the gifts we have received from your hand. Guide us to

honest, peaceful, joyous relationships, that your will may be done among us. Amen.

For the last two weeks we have been exploring the birth and life of John who became John the Baptizer. Now we learn what he was teaching the people who came to him to be baptized. How was he differently from Jesus?

This week's scripture gives us the answer. Nowhere else does the difference between John and Jesus stand out so clearly because, whatever the message of John was, it was not a gospel. It was not good news; it was news of terror.

John had lived in the desert. The desert was covered with stubble and brushwood, as dry as tinder. Sometimes a spark set the face of the desert on fire and out from their crannies came the vipers, asps, and cobras, scurrying in terror from the menacing flames. It was to them John likened the people who came to be baptized.

One reason for these people to be insincere was the ancient belief that Jews were the favored-nation. They held that God would judge other nations with one standard but the Jews with another. They, in fact, held that they were safe from judgment simply by virtue of the fact that they were Jewish. Children of Abraham were exempt from judgment. John told

them that racial privilege meant nothing; that life not lineage was God's standard of judgment. Many of John's hearers were shocked when he said that being Abraham's descendants was not enough to ensure salvation. There was no "get out of jail free" cards.

Some people, especially the religious leaders, wanted to be baptized by John so they could escape eternal punishment, but they were not really repenting from sin nor were they willing to change the way they lived. They wanted eternal life, but they didn't want to work for it by changing their hearts and lives. John said that everyone has to commit to it on his or her own. They shouldn't rely on someone else's faith for their salvation. (*This is true even today.*)

There are three outstanding things about John's message. It began by demanding that people should share with one another. It was a social gospel which laid it down that God will never absolve anyone who is content to have too much while others have too little.

His message also ordered people not to leave their jobs, but to work out their own salvation by doing those jobs as they should be done. Let the tax-collector be a good and honest tax-collector; let the soldier be a good and compassionate soldier. People had a duty to serve God where God had set them. It

was John's conviction that there is nowhere we can serve God better than in our daily work.

Thirdly John was quite sure that he himself was only the forerunner. The King was still to come and with him would come judgment.

So John painted a picture of judgment, but it was a judgment which could be met with confidence only by those who had served their neighbors and faithfully done their day's work.

John's message took root in unexpected places – among the poor, the dishonest, and even the hated occupation army. These people were painfully aware of their needs and they were honestly seeking to know what to do to change their lives. Did anyone follow John's advice? Surely some did, and their softened hearts became ready to receive the message of the One who has to come. They were making the way straight for Jesus.

Are you ready? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

So much to learn and so little time. But there is always time to turn away from sin and turn to you instead, dear God. God doesn't worry about how much is in our brain, but what is in our hearts. We

can read as many books as we want but are we inspired to action by reading it.

We need to pray to learn how to pursue God's will in our world. How can we help God's mission? We must open our eyes and our hearts to see God in every person we meet and seek how we can help that person. Are they hungry? Are they thirsty? Do they need a roof over their heads? Or do they just need someone to talk to, someone to listen to them, someone to be a presence in their life, someone to pray for them and with them. Have mercy on us, O Holy One, as we fail so many times.

We pray for all those on our prayer list. We pray for our world and the people in it. We pray for peace in this world and we care for our neighbors. We pray all these things in the name of the one who taught us to pray . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO SHARE:

Whether we face plenty or hunger, abundance or want, we are in debt to God for all we have and all we are. In these moments of thankfulness, we remember how God has blessed us. We give with joy because we trust the God of our salvation.

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

We rejoice, O God of peace, in the privilege of giving without fear. You come to us daily with blessings too numerous to count. You are the Holy One whose presence relieves our anxieties, feeds our hungers, and stirs our compassion. Through our offerings, we express our gratitude. As we give of ourselves, we respond to your call to bear fruit and to make your name known among the nations. Thank you for accepting all we offer. Amen.

***RESPONSIVE BENEDICTION:**

The whole universe is God's dwelling place.
Find your home with God wherever you go.

**Surely God is our salvation;
we will trust and not be afraid.**

Rejoice, for Christ has come and is coming, whose presence brings peace to our hearts and minds.

**We can do all things in Christ, who strengthens us.
We have much to share with the world.**

God, who has blessed you, commissions you for service. Shout and sing for joy; praise God in all you do.
God has renewed and refreshed us this day. God's strength will be our song wherever we go. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Joe Knapp, Agnes Doctolero, David Seneczyn, Cathy Ganschinietz, Jack Harris, Doris Moody, Lynn Hursey, Robert Uhrig, Carol White, Dan Regan.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE WILL NOT BE A BULLETIN FOR DECEMBER 24 OR 26 MAILED OR EMAILED OUT. COME TO CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE AT 7 PM AND ENJOY AND JOIN IN TO THE CHRISTMAS CAROLS WE LOVE.