

DECEMBER 4, 2022
2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT



*St. John United Church of Christ
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Rev. Rosemary Captain*

*Liturgy – Rev. Mia M. McClain
Communion liturgy – Dr. Thom Shuman*

LITANY OF THE ADVENT CANDLE:

One: In this season, we can be overwhelmed with so many things – busyness, impatience, despair, and even violence.

All: As we wait for the Prince of Peace.

One: Today, we gather to listen for the voice crying in the wilderness, comforting us and challenging us at the same time.

All: We need to be surprised by the Spirit this season.

One: Today is the first step of turning toward God with expectation.

All: We come with open ears, open minds, and open hearts.

One: God's Spirit calls us to worship and to work for justice.

All: We have come in to be overwhelmed with peace.

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: A shoot soon comes from Jesse's stump,
And a branch shall spring from roots.

All: Rejoice! Rejoice! All God's children.

Let all the people give God praise.

One: A leader soon comes who will lift the poor
With righteousness around his waist.

All: Rejoice! Rejoice! All God's children.

Let all the people give God praise.

One: A child soon comes from an innocent place
With wisdom and might he'll lead the way.

All: Rejoice! Rejoice! All God's children.

Let all the people give God praise. (Inspired by Isaiah 11:1-10 and Romans 15:4-13)

***INVOCATION:**

God of the waiting wanderers in the wilderness,
We enter this moment of worship expecting that when we
leave this hour of prayer, we will be full of the courage
needed to stand as a signal. We come to the mountain to

feel closer to your presence, O God.
May the mountains yield prosperity for your people.
May righteousness flourish and peace abound.
You, alone, are the God who does wondrous things.
May your glory fill this place as we worship you in spirit and
in truth. Amen. -Inspired by Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

One: The prophet offers an inspiring vision of the world – a vision of weapons being used to grow food and the lion at peace with the lamb. We recognize the distance between God’s vision of this peace and our own reality. We draw near to God now, asking for reconciliation.

***All: Holy God, sometimes we allow your voice calling for peace to be overwhelmed by those voices clamoring for war. Without hope for real and lasting peace, we grow distant and apathetic. We confess that we even lose faith in you. Heal us and restore our faith that peace is possible. Amen.**

***WORDS OF ASSURANCE:**

Even though we find ourselves on the road and in the wilderness, we never go alone. God straightens our path and calls us forward with justice and peace. In the power of that love, we are forgiven. Amen.

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near.
As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God
always here. (repeat two more times.)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

FIRST TESTAMENT READING: Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot from Jesse’s stump

11 A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse;
a branch will sprout^[a] from his roots.

²The LORD’s spirit will rest upon him,
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of planning and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and fear of the LORD.

³He will delight in fearing the LORD.

He won’t judge by appearances,
nor decide by hearsay.

⁴He will judge the needy with righteousness,
and decide with equity for those who suffer in the land.

He will strike the violent^[b] with the rod of his mouth;
by the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked.

⁵Righteousness will be the belt around his hips,
and faithfulness the belt around his waist.

⁶The wolf will live with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat;
the calf and the young lion will feed^[c] together,
and a little child will lead them.

⁷The cow and the bear will graze.

Their young will lie down together,
and a lion will eat straw like an ox.

⁸A nursing child will play over the snake’s hole;
toddlers will reach right over the serpent’s den.

⁹They won’t harm or destroy anywhere on my holy
mountain. The earth will surely be filled with the knowledge
of the LORD, just as the water covers the sea.

A signal to the peoples

¹⁰ On that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a signal to the peoples. The nations will seek him out, and his dwelling will be glorious.

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 15:4-13 ⁴ Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures. ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude toward each other, similar to Christ Jesus' attitude. ⁶ That way you can glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ together with one voice. ⁷ So welcome each other, in the same way that Christ also welcomed you, for God's glory. ⁸ I'm saying that Christ became a servant of those who are circumcised for the sake of God's truth, in order to confirm the promises given to the ancestors, ⁹ and so that the Gentiles could glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

*Because of this I will confess you among the Gentiles,
and I will sing praises to your name.^[a] ¹⁰ And again, it says, Rejoice, Gentiles, with his people.^[b] ¹¹ And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and all the people should sing his praises.^[c] ¹² And again, Isaiah says, There will be a root of Jesse, who will also rise to rule the Gentiles.*

The Gentiles will place their hope in him.^[d]

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 3:1-12**
Ministry of John the Baptist

³ In those days John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea announcing, ² "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!" ³ He was the one of whom Isaiah the prophet spoke when he said:

*The voice of one shouting in the wilderness,
"Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight."^[a]*

⁴ John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey.

⁵ People from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and all around the Jordan River came to him. ⁶ As they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. ⁷ Many Pharisees and Sadducees came to be baptized by John. He said to them, "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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ I baptize with water those of you who have changed your hearts and lives. The one who is coming after me is stronger than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹² 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."

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Who is John the Baptizer?”

The appearance of John was like the sudden sounding of the voice of God. At this time, the Jews were sadly aware that the voice of the prophets spoke no more. They said that for 400 years there had been no prophet. Throughout long centuries, the voice of prophecy had been silent. There was no voice, nor any that answered. But in John the prophetic voice spoke again. Can you imagine? It would be like Jesus returning and making a tour of all the great concert venues across the world. No wonder people walked across hundreds of miles just to hear him speak.

What then were the characteristics of John and his message?

He fearlessly denounced evil wherever he could find it. If Herod the king sinned by contracting an evil and unlawful marriage, John rebuked him. If the Sadducees and Pharisees, the leaders of orthodox religion, the “church” leaders of their day, were stuck in ritualistic formalism, John never hesitated to say so. If ordinary people were living lives which were unaware of God, John would tell them so.

John was like a light which lit up the dark places; he was like a wind which swept from God throughout the country. John’s message and delivery was very sharp and piercing. Some of his listeners were offended by what he said.

It may be that there have been times when the Church was too careful not to offend. It didn’t want to ruffle anyone’s feathers. There comes occasions when the time for smooth politeness has gone, and the time for blunt reprimand has come.

John urgently summoned men and women to righteousness. John’s message was not a mere negative denunciation; it was a positive erecting of the moral standards of God. He not only denounced people for what they had done; he summoned them to what they ought to do. He not only condemned them for what they were; he challenged them to be what they could be. He was like a voice calling people to higher things.

John came from God. He came out of the desert. He came among the people only after he had undergone years of lonely preparation by God. He came not with some opinion of his own, but with a message from God. For along time before he spoke to the world, had kept company with God. The preacher, the teacher with the prophetic voice, must always come into the presence of others out of the presence of God.

John pointed beyond himself. The man was not only a light to shine on all that was evil, a voice to admonish sin, he was also a signpost to God. It was not himself whom he wished people to see; he wished to prepare them for the one who was to come.

It was the Jewish belief that Elijah would return before the Messiah came, and he would be the signal of the coming King. We can find that in the book of Malachi; “Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.”

John wore a garment of camel’s hair, and a leather belt around his waist, which is what Elijah wore, according to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Matthew connects John with a prophecy from Isaiah 40:3. In ancient time in the middle east, the roads were bad. There was a

proverb which said: “There are three states of misery – sickness, fasting and travel.” A traveler setting out on a journey was advised to settle his accounts and write his will. He might not make it back.

The ordinary roads were no better than tracks. They were not surfaced at all because the soil of Palestine is hard and will bear the traffic of mules, donkeys, oxen and carts. A journey along such a road was an adventure, and indeed an undertaking to be avoided.

There were a few surfaced and artificially made roads. For example Solomon laid a causeway of black basalt stone along the roads that led to Jerusalem to make them easier for the pilgrims. These types of roads were originally built by the king and for the use of the king. They were called “the king’s highway.” They were kept in repair only as the king needed them for any journey that he might make. Before the king was due to arrive in any area, a message was sent out to the people to get the King’s roads in order for the king’s journey.

John was preparing the way for the king. Preachers, teachers with prophetic voices, point not at themselves, but at God. Their aim is not to focus their eyes on their own cleverness, but on the majesty of God. The people recognized John as a prophet, even after years when no prophetic voice had spoken, because he was a light to light up evil things, a voice to summon men and women to righteousness, and a signpost to point them to God, and because he had in him that inexplicable authority which clings to anyone who comes into the presence of others out of the presence of God.

I hope this description of John, the times, the people, their hopes, and the roads, helps to clarify what we will hear in our scriptures, as we come closer to God during this advent season. Amen.

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

God of nature, God in history, God in the church, we give thanks to you for all that you have created for us to share in our world. We celebrate any victory accomplished in justice over oppression. Help us continue to make a just world for all.

Bless and extend the church of your Son, our Savior. Inspire all members of your church that they may continue to care for each other in our difficult world. Sustain all members of our faith family including those who can not be with us in person.

First Creator, by your love we are given children through the miracle of birth. May we greet each new child, including Alister and Garrett, with joy and surround them with faith so they may know who you are and want to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Bless every agency that seeks to serve children who have had a difficult events in their short lives.

Loving Christ, send your healing spirit to the sick in body, mind, or spirit, renew them in strength and in the trust that your power will keep them in your care, that, in life and in death, underneath are your everlasting arms.

Be with us as we celebrate Advent and the coming of your Son. May we be prepared to receive him. As we pray in his name. . .

THE 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

RESPONSE: Third verse of "Away in a Manger"

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay close by me forever, and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in your tender care. And fit us for heaven, to live with you there.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING: We take a moment to share our offerings in worship because giving is an act of faith. Whether we offer money, prayers, or volunteer our time, our gifts are like seeds of hope. When we offer them, we are trusting God to bless them and to use them. We are saying that we believe in God's vision of restoration and justice. Let us be bold in our hope as we share our offerings.

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

Holy God, we are thankful for all the voices that remind us of your love, especially for those prophets that call us to stretch the boundaries of our faith. We answer their challenge and offer these gifts on our Advent journey, so that your peace might reign. Amen.

***HOLY COMMUNION:**

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

May the Advent God give you hope.

May God grant you peace.

Let us lift our hearts to God who offers righteousness to all.

We open our hearts to the One who loves justice.

Children of God, rejoice in the One who call us to live in harmony with everyone.

Amen and Amen! We give our thanks to God!

In those days when chaos reigned, creation appeared, Coming God, as you spoke the Word which caused snow to cap mountains; as you breathed the Spirit which give life to sheep and shepherds; as your steadfast loved shaped all that is good and beautiful and good.

All this was intended for those clothed in your image of grace and hope, but we insisted on putting on sin's coat, cinching death's belt around our ways. Through the prophets of every age, we heard your words of encouragement, but chose to keep looking for life in the seductions offered to us by sin.

So, in that moment we least expected, Jesus came, to baptize us with the Holy Spirit's peace and hope.

With those who have trouble playing nice, with those who seek to bear fruit, together with one voice, we glorify you:

Holy, holy, holy are you, God who gives hope to all.

All creation gathers your harvest of peace.

Hosanna in the highest!

**Blessed is the One who stands side-by-side
with the most vulnerable.
Hosanna in the highest!**

In your holiness, God who approaches, we find
righteousness and justice;
in your Child, Jesus, we discover our salvation and hope.
When the world dumps buckets of muddy meanness over
us, he baptizes us in the Spirit's cleansing waters.
When those around us throw stones of bitterness and
fear, he takes them to build homes of hope.
When people would try to divide us, he builds a park where
enemies push each other in swings, and sit side-by-side on
the grass for the Lamb's picnic.

As we inch closer to Bethlehem, as we wait for the kingdom
to draw near, we sing of that mystery which comes as faith:

**This is the One who died, blessing those who feared him;
this is the One who was raised, the Spirit of resurrection
resting on him; this is the One who will come, to give
justice to everyone.**

Now in these days, as we gather around the table gifted
with the bread and the cup, may your Spirit of wisdom rest
on us, so we may recognize the vulnerable and welcome
their gifts in our lives; may your Spirit of might rest upon us,
so we may stand up to injustices around us; may your Spirit
of unity rest upon us, so we may resist all people,
all words, which seek to divide us;

may your Spirit of compassion rest upon us, so we may
remember, and serve, the hungry, the homeless, the lonely,
in this holiest of seasons.

And when your harvest of peace comes at the end of all
time, and we are gathered with our siblings around your
feast, we will sing and glorify you forever, God in
Community, Holy in One. Amen.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING: We give thanks,
almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by
granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our
faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth
into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the
power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Savior,
Amen.**

***SENDING:**

As God has welcomed us in these moments,
let us go to embrace each person we meet.

As Jesus has been our servant of hope and grace,
let us go to serve the most vulnerable around us.

As the Spirit of hope has filled us,
let us go to empty ourselves of joy and peace for all.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff,
Carol White, Cheri Schtzenhofer, Theo Mally, Jane Riess,
Sandy Fort, Becky Ballard, Rosemary Williams, Larry
Wagner, Floyd Lorenz, Alister and Garrett Pickens.