



**GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA**

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## **Second Sunday of Advent**

**December 5, 2021**

### **Tree of Life**

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."

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping in-person and on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmiñəḥ̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

## GATHERING

### CALL TO WORSHIP AND LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

(Paraphrase of Luke 1:68-79)

We gather today in the name of our Lord, the God of Israel, who has come to us and set us free. For God has raised for us a mighty Saviour, born of the house of King David, promised to us through the holy prophets, to save us from all that oppress, enslave, and hate with a hand of grace and mercy and love.

And so we together to worship without fear, recreated and reformed to be holy and righteous before you, all the days of our lives. In our worship and preparation, we bless this tree that symbolizes life and new birth. May its branches that will soon adorn marks of your beauty, remind us of your reaching out to us in love and grace.

So as we did last week on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of this season of waiting, we light the first candle of this wreath, representing the hope of the promises of our God the Most High of salvation and the forgiveness of sins..

And as today in this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent, we light the second candle on this wreath to represent the peace we receive from the tender compassion of our God, that breaks the dawn from on high upon us to shine on us, lifting us from the shadow of death and guiding us further into this peace, through Jesus Christ, our coming and present Messiah.

**Amen.**

**GATHERING SONG:** On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry (#249) verses 1, 3, 5

### GREETING

The hopeful grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the peaceful love of God, and the joyful fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of the covenant, you send us messengers to prepare us for your entrance into the world. Help us to endure the refining and purifying of the life changing messages of the prophets, that we might more clearly see you when you appear among us, in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

## WORD

### FIRST READING: Malachi 3:1-4

A reading from Malachi.

*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.*

<sup>1</sup>See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight— indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; <sup>3</sup>he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. <sup>4</sup>Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## **SECOND READING: Philippians 1:3-11**

A reading from Philippians.

*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.*

<sup>3</sup>I thank my God every time I remember you, <sup>4</sup>constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, <sup>5</sup>because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup>I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup>For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup>And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight <sup>10</sup>to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, <sup>11</sup>having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 10)**

### **GOSPEL: Luke 3:1-6**

The holy gospel according to Luke.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*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.*

<sup>1</sup>In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, <sup>2</sup>during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, <sup>4</sup>as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.

<sup>5</sup>Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth;  
<sup>6</sup>and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'”

The gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### **SERMON**

Holy One, through your Spirit instruct us by the faith and wisdom of your prophets. Shine your peace and love into our hearts, that we might hear and heed to your call to become your path into the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Last week our daughter came up to me out of the blue and said “Dad, I want to watch ‘Hot Guy’”. Now, most parents would be worried if they heard their 7 year old say something like this, but you have to realise that our kids watch a LOT of YouTube and that platform is full of weirdly titled videos and even weirder content creators, so I just assumed it was some channel of some kid who was trying to be funny by calling himself that or making a video with that title. I just shrugged and said ok. But then she came back a little while later asking to watch “Hot Guy” and I admittedly was a bit annoyed and I told her that I didn’t know what “Hot Guy” even was. Then she looked at me confused and was like, *you* don’t know what it is? Then it hit me...

She was talking about Hawkeye.

I know what you’re thinking, “who?!?”, and I wouldn’t be surprised. See, Hawkeye is a recurring character in the Marvel movies and one of the original Avengers, but he is also probably the most obscure member of the team. If I said Captain America, Iron Man, or Thor, you’d totally know who I was talking about. But Hawkeye? Not so much. The character didn’t even have his own title until like last week when Disney+ released a 6-episode series starring him, which is what our daughter actually wanted to watch. She wanted to watch it, but even then she couldn’t even get his name right. That is how obscure and relatively unknown this character is.

I think one of the reasons why Hawkeye goes so unnoticed is that while he’s an original member of the Avengers, the world’s mightiest heroes, this collection of remarkable people assembled to fight the battles that the world never could, he was just a regular dude who was really good at shooting arrows. You know, like Robin Hood or Cupid or that guy from America’s Got Talent from a couple years ago. So you could imagine that those who have actually heard of him just made fun of him over the years, as he’s on this team of superheroes fighting crazy super powered enemies and his usefulness ends as soon as his arrow quiver runs dry. He even says it himself in the Age of Ultron movie, “Ok, look, the city is flying, we’re fighting an army of robots, and I have a bow and arrow. None of this makes sense.”

Or does it?

Some mega fans have pointed out that the only time that the Avengers lose or fall apart is when Hawkeye isn’t there. Every time the team of remarkable people get ahead of themselves and bite off a bit more than they can chew, you’ll notice Hawkeye is absent. Whenever these

god-like superheroes get caught up in their own superiority and god-complex, it's regular human Hawkeye that brings them down a notch and back to humanity.

And to be honest, this really reminds me of John the Baptizer. I'm not saying that Hawkeye wears camel hair and eats locusts, although he doesn't often wear proper armour when he goes into fights. Nor am I saying that John the Baptizer punishes those who don't repent with an arrow in their leg, although "brood of vipers" is an insult that would sting pretty bad. But what I mean is that John, too, is sort of an underdog. He's a regular, unremarkable guy that most people in that time would have just said, "who?!?"

See in John the Baptizer's introduction in Luke, we get these really hard to pronounce names and places. At first glance you might think that Luke is just giving the historical context of this story, I mean it does start with "in the fifteenth year" after all. But looking at the names that are listed, we'll see that they're all the best of the best at the time. La crème de la crème, as it were. These were the most powerful, the most respected, the most feared, and the most religious people that the readers would know. They are the ones who are the most revered and listened to, the ones who are talked about the most and get the most press, the ones who would very easily get their own movie and sequels or at least plays or scrolls or whatever. They are the easiest and clearest choice to bear the Word of God in this climate, they are shoe-ins to be God's chosen, they would be the obvious front runners to be called to prepare the way of the Lord.

But instead, the Word of God came to John.

And that is where most people of the time would say "who?!?" as John was a nobody, born to very elderly parents, wore funny clothes and ate weird food, and had no fixed address. There's no way that God would choose someone like John.

But God did. God does. And God will continue to do so.

The text tells us that John went and proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin as he prepared the way of the Lord according to the prophet Isaiah. The way of the Lord is straight paths, where the valleys are filled and the mountains and hills made low. Level, smooth, and non-obstacle-filled ground.

I would imagine this would be a hard message to hear in those days. Not because it's confusing, or obscure, or even a difficult riddle. But this message or any message for that matter would be hard to hear because it came from someone like John. We don't want to hear teaching from weirdos. We don't trust misfits. We can't imagine that God's word would come from someone who was so powerless and nobody.

But at the same time, it needs to come exactly from someone like John, because he is the exact embodiment of this message. He is the prime example of how sin moves the hills to become mountains and the valleys to become deep holes. Just by being himself he is revealing to the world how we make the crooked even more out of shape by our assumptions and prejudices. He is the exact person that was needed to prepare the way as a nobody, ordinary, unremarkable.

But an ordinary unremarkable nobody that is loved and called by God.

See this is what John's message means by bringing down the mountains and bringing up the valleys. This is what Isaiah was talking about by smoothing out the rough ways. This is the preparing of the way of God's entrance into the world, by seeing the equality in God's love, the equitable forgiveness of God's grace, and the invitation to, the welcome for, and the acceptance of all people into the eternal and everlasting kingdom of God.

Now this isn't to say that every weird person on the street has a divine message for us to repent and seek forgiveness. This doesn't mean that we should take every word that comes out of anyone's mouth as truth. I'm not saying that we need to throw out our lens of discernment and view everyone as a prophet. But it is to say that just because someone is weird and doesn't fit our mold, that doesn't mean that they don't have some wisdom to offer. It is to say that we shouldn't judge a book by its cover, a superhero by their superpowers or lack thereof, or a messenger of God by their upbringing, background, and choice of clothing or diet. And it is also to say that the Word of God can come even to us when we might not believe in ourselves to have the understanding or knowledge or gift of what God is doing in the world today.

See God chooses the powerless as well. God chooses the unexpected. God chooses even us.

So who might the people be that we disregard and throw down into the valleys from our lofty hills? Who are the ones that we place up on mountainous pedestals and blindly admire and follow? Who are the ones that we choose not to listen to just because they aren't exactly what we expected?

Whoever they are, whether it be a stranger or a close friend, a far out celebrity or even ourselves, let's remember John the Baptizer's message of repentance and forgiveness, leading us all on the same level as everyone else, a level where God's love reigns, God's grace is equally and freely given, and God's peace surpasses all our human understanding and power.

This Advent, as we continue to look forward to *God with us*, may we be aware of God bringing up the lowly and humbling the lofty in peace, that the path into our community and hearts be straight and smooth for the Lord to enter. Thanks be to God. Amen

**HYMN OF THE DAY:** There's a Voice in the Wilderness (#255)

**APOSTLES' CREED** (p.11)

With all of God's people made level and equal, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.\*  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,**

**and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Called into the refining fire of God's Spirit, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "in your tender compassion, O God," and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. In your tender compassion, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, the God of Israel, you have come into the world to set us free through the life and ministry of Jesus our mighty Saviour. You raise us up and welcome us into the peace of your salvation. Remind us of this truth always, that our regard for and relationship with others be a proclamation of your love. In your tender compassion, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, the God of our worship, you have sent us prophets and bearers of your message of peace to save us from our guilt and shame. Strengthen us as your modern day messengers to relay that hope and peace to the world. We pray especially for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop and bishop elect Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and for our companion congregations of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Mount Zion Lutheran Church in Smithers and the pastors and leaders that serve there; as well as our own ministry here at Grace in Burnaby and all the things that we are involved in. In your tender compassion, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, the God of all creation, from the beginning you have allowed us to live in this world that you have made, and you promised our ancestors that you will always be with us in it. May our stewardship of the earth be pleasing and fruitful, that it might continue to house us as it did the generations before us. And we pray for all areas of the world that are affected by harsh weather and natural disasters, especially those in our province that have experienced flooding and the effects of the hard rains. Watch over those affected and place your hand of healing on the lands. In your tender compassion, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, the God of justice, you made us free to worship you without fear, but the laws and statues we humans put in place sometimes hinders and prevents that truth. Be with all areas of the world that face political turmoil and religious persecution, and allow your peace that leads us to equality to spread throughout the world. We pray especially for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; that their journey out of danger in the midst of the pandemic be swift and without complication. In your tender compassion, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, the God of healing, by your grace you give us the knowledge of your salvation and the forgiveness of sin, as the dawn from on high breaks upon us and welcomes us into your kingdom. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love and peace be apparent to us all. Especially we pray for Diana; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Paula; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Charlotte; William; Owen; those who have been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

In your tender compassion, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, the God of peace, you shine your welcome on all of us and those who dwell in the shadow of death, and you bring us together to live in your kingdom as the one body of Christ. Remind us always of our eternal connection with you and all the saints, that our feet might be guided into the way of peace. In your tender compassion, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the hope and peace brought to us by Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

### **PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

### **MEAL**

### **DIALOGUE**

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.**

### **THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

It is indeed right, our duty, and our joy, that we should at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who bring us all hope and peace, knowing that your salvation has come near and that we are all invited and welcomed into your presence.

For on the night that he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus sat with the disciples for a meal, where he took some bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it and said, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you, do this for the remembrance of me."

And after they had eaten, Jesus took the common cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them to drink from saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this food given to us that reveals to us the peace of the Spirit, joining us together as one declaring this mystery of faith:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

All honour and glory be to you, O God, through our coming Saviour and Messiah Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

### **LORD'S PRAYER (p. 17)**

Gathered as a level plain by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.



**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 forever. Amen.**

### **INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

Take and eat, God welcomes us all into peace.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **COMMUNION**

**COMMUNION HYMNS:** Lamb of God (p. 17)  
The King Shall Come (#260)  
Wait for the Lord (#262)

### **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

God of all righteousness, we give you thanks for again feeding us with your truth, your love, and your peace. Fill us with hope that as we continue looking forward to your hand at work in the world, we might be energized to serve you and neighbour by your grace, through Jesus Christ.  
**Amen.**

### **SENDING**

#### **BLESSING**

God of our hope bring you blessing and security,  
God of all peace shine on you and be gracious onto you,  
God of every nation and tribe look upon you with favour and steadfast love,  
now and forever.  
**Amen.**

**SENDING HYMN:** Prepare the Royal Highway (#264) verses 1, 4

#### **DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, be prepared for the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**