



## GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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### **Third Sunday of Advent December 11, 2022 Tree of Life**

A note of joyful expectation marks today's worship. Isaiah announces that the desert shall rejoice and blossom, and Jesus points to the unexpected and transforming signs of God's reign. We wait with patience for the coming of the Lord, even as we rejoice at his presence among us this day: in word and holy supper, in church and in our homes, in silent reflection and in works of justice and love. We pray that God would open our eyes and ears to the wonders of Christ's advent among us.

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 hən̓q̓əmiñəŋ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

## GATHERING

### CALL TO WORSHIP AND LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH:

We gather together in worship, proclaiming the greatness of the Lord and rejoicing in our Saviour God, for we are looked upon with favour and blessed with the great things that God has done and continues to do in and around our lives and community. God shows mercy, gives us strength, filled us with good thing, and comes to our aid according the promise made to our forebears.

And so we praise our God for the victory in our salvation, the joyous gift of grace, and the triumphant love shown to us through Christ, as we mark our preparation of his advent through the lighting of these candles on this wreath. May our faith be strengthened, our minds enlightened, and our hearts emboldened to serve our God and neighbour and community always.

### *Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah* (#240) verses 1-3

Grant these things to us, O God, through Christ our Lord,  
whose coming is certain and whose day draws near.

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

### GATHERING HYMN: People, Look East (#248)

### GREETING

The strengthening grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the enlightening love of God, and the faithful witness of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

### HYMN OF PRAISE (p. 6)

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God, may your power be stirred up in us as we await with abundant expectation the fulfillment of your eternal presence in creation, that we might see and recognize you in the world, working in and through us with your salvific love, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Messiah. **Amen.**

## WORD

### FIRST READING: Isaiah 35:1-10

A reading from Isaiah.

*The prophet describes the return from the Babylonian captivity as a joyous procession to Zion. God's coming reign will bring a renewal of creation in which health and wholeness will be restored. There is no need for fear, for God is coming to save.*

<sup>1</sup>The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus <sup>2</sup>it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,

the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the LORD,  
the majesty of our God.  
<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.  
<sup>4</sup>Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
“Be strong, do not fear!  
Here is your God.  
He will come with vengeance,  
with terrible recompense.  
He will come and save you.”  
<sup>5</sup>Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
<sup>6</sup>then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.  
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;  
<sup>7</sup>the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.  
<sup>8</sup>A highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
the unclean shall not travel on it,  
but it shall be for God’s people;  
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.  
<sup>9</sup>No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there,  
but the redeemed shall walk there.  
<sup>10</sup>And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM: Luke 1:46b-55**

<sup>46b</sup>My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup>my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup>**for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your lowly servant.**  
**From this day all generations will call me blessed:**  
<sup>49</sup>you, the Almighty, have done great things for me  
and holy is your name.  
<sup>50</sup>**You have mercy on those who fear you,**  
**from generation to generation.**

<sup>51</sup>You have shown strength with your arm  
and scattered the proud in their conceit,  
<sup>52</sup>**casting down the mighty from their thrones  
and lifting up the lowly.**  
<sup>53</sup>You have filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away empty.  
<sup>54</sup>**You have come to the aid of your servant Israel,  
to remember the promise of mercy,**  
<sup>55</sup>the promise made to our forebears,  
to Abraham and his children forever.

## **SECOND READING: James 5:7-10**

A reading from James.

*In anticipation of the Lord's coming, Christians are called upon to cultivate patience rather than discontent.*

<sup>7</sup>Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup>You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. <sup>9</sup>Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! <sup>10</sup>As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

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

### **GOSPEL: Matthew 11:2-11**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*John the Baptist expects the Messiah to bring God's judgment upon the earth (Matt. 3:11-12). From a prison cell, he wonders whether Jesus is the one who will do this. Jesus' response indicates that God's reign is indeed being fulfilled already through healing and restoration.*

<sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

<sup>7</sup>As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.'

<sup>11</sup>Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

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

### **SERMON**

Lord God, may your Spirit be poured out in the dry and dusty places of our lives to allow your Word to blossom in our lives, through Jesus Christ, our way through the wilderness. Amen.

So this past week was the week of Christmas concerts for our kids, and while I love our kids and all, these concerts are always sort of a pain to go to. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate the work that goes into these events by the school, the teachers, the students, and the volunteers, except for maybe the sound people as more often than not the sound is just abysmal at best. But still, I'll always support the school and our kids in their concerts, I don't have a problem with that part of it at all. No, the real pain comes from dealing with the other parents.

Please, allow me to apologize in advance to any of you parents who might engage in these sort of activities, but to me, it's just frustrating when people stand up during the performances regardless of where they're sitting and without any thought to who might be sitting behind them, just so that they can get a better view. And if they're not standing up, they're holding their phones and in some cases full sized tablets up in the air to record their kid, which of course also blocks the view of those behind them, who are also trying to record the performance with their phones and in some cases full sized tablets. And don't even get me started on the maniacal waving to get their children's attention, somehow in hopes that their kid would recognise them and wave back. Here's a protip, when 90% of the people there are waving as well, it's not easy for kids to pick their parents out of the crowd especially when there's a spotlight in their face. Waving harder and wilder won't help. Calling out their name might, which happens as well, but of course that is kind of frowned upon because you know, that is disruptive.

Again, I'll always support our kids in going to their concerts, more than once even if my schedule allows it, but most of the time I can't ever really enjoy the show. I find myself shaking my head a lot, muttering under my breath in frustration, and making subtle hand gestures that no one can see. And the worst part of it all, is that I have to bear all of this just to watch one of our kids on stage for roughly 3-5, if even that. Most of the show features other kids that I don't even know.

So it'd seem like the cost/benefit ratio isn't really in my favour. In fact, I'd say that it is very much not. It's like I'm setting myself up for disappointment every time I go to one of these things. I mean I go hoping to see our kids shine on stage, and while I might see a bit of that, mostly it's covered up by, you know, people standing up in front of me trying to record it with their phones or in some cases full sized tablets.

I mean, is this the parent concert experience? Or should I look forward to something else?

Suddenly I can understand John the baptizer's sentiment around Jesus while he sits there in his jail cell. Sure, John has it a lot worse right now than my kid's concert experiences, seeing as how he's unjustly imprisoned for making a remark against the king, so it might not seem like it

relates. But that disappointment that he feels is real. We might not think so as in our hindsight Jesus is obviously the Messiah that John is wondering about. But for John? Jesus didn't really check any of the boxes at all.

We all know what the ancient Jews were looking forward to. We know what they expected in a Messiah. We all know that their hope in political power and freedom was dashed away when this Jesus character showed up eating and drinking with the uneducated and sinful.

And while John had a different insight on the whole matter as we learned from last week, he still had doubts in his mind. Although he knew that the Messiah would be different and not what people expected, he still wondered if perhaps he had his faith in the wrong place. Although John the baptizer, one of the main characters in the biblical narrative and one of the pillars of our faith, already proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah when he baptized him, he was still left a bit... disappointed.

So he did what he could to get to the bottom of it, he sent some of his people to ask Jesus if he really was the Messiah or if he should be looking forward for another. Perhaps it was John's passive aggressive way of saying, "get on with it, man" and nudging Jesus to rouse up some rabble already. But not just any kind of rabble, but the right kind of rabble that would... you know... maybe keep John out of incarceration?

But Jesus, in a very Jesus fashion, doesn't exactly answer John's question. He doesn't say "yes I'm the Messiah" or "no, I'm not", but instead he just tells them what they hear and see, "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers and cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."

Uh, ok Jesus, that's nice. But those aren't things that the Messiah is supposed to be doing. No, the Messiah isn't supposed to heal, but the Messiah is supposed to save. And right now, John's sitting in a jail cell not exactly feeling all that saved. So this answer doesn't really give John all that much comfort as he isn't blind, or lame, or deaf. What does he get out of all this? What is his cost/benefit ratio? What is the Messiah going to do for him?

You know as we were leaving our younger kids' concert this past week, we realised that this was our daughter's time performing on stage like that as the pandemic disallowed it her whole elementary school life. And when we told her, she couldn't be more excited. She really enjoyed herself up there and it really ignited her flare for performing arts. She's mentioned in the past that she would be interested in getting into musical theatre and this time up on stage had her revisit that idea. Whether or not something comes out of it, we'll see, but at least she had this opportunity and it added some fullness to her life.

It made me realise that these concerts aren't just about my needs and wants. It isn't about my comfort levels and annoyance tolerances. It isn't about the parents. But it's about the kids. The kids doing something different together. The kids exploring the different aspects of their schooling. The kids working together to create something that might not be beautiful on the surface as some of them are really bad singers, but something beautiful for them as they are given a gift to be part of the whole production.

I know, this isn't exactly salvation or the Messiah's doing, but the point is that sometimes things come in packages that we don't expect. Sometimes things aren't as they seem. Sometimes,

God comes to us in surprising ways to show us just how we are loved and cherished and even saved.

See John the baptizer was hoping for a different kind of salvation, a different kind of change to the world as he knew it, a different kind of Messiah. So when Jesus came as he did, John was a little taken aback with what he got. And even though John didn't get it right away, Jesus continues to call him the greatest of these, that he is more than just a prophet, but a faithful messenger that is pleasing to God.

And this is the work of the Messiah. Not to come in flashy, pitch-perfect packages. Not to show up with a mighty hand and sharp sword. Not to defeat our enemies and be all that we had hoped the Messiah to be, but to bring people together in peace and healing. To show the world love and compassion and hope in community. To save us in ways that we perhaps didn't even know we needed saving in. And above all, to show all people the value and worth that we share as God's people, joint heirs in the gospel, beloved siblings saved by grace.

So in all that we do and all that we are, we can take the time to see and recognise the surprising ways that God appears in and around our lives, giving us hope and joy in the love and peace of God that we can reflect onto all people, annoying parent or not, together living in God's kingdom.

In this season of Advent, may we continue to be filled with the hope of the Spirit, allowing us to love and be loved, saved by the grace of our benevolent and surprising God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY:** My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness (#251)

**CREED** (p. 12)

Together with those in abundant anticipation of the advent of Christ, 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**

Led into the anticipation and recognition of the Spirit in our midst, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "Lord, in your abundant mercy," and you all are invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. Lord, in your abundant mercy, **hear our prayer**.

God our Saviour, we proclaim your greatness to all the world for all that you have done, and we rejoice in you. May we reflect your love in all that we do, and may our ministry to others be pleasing in your sight. Especially we pray for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Kathy, assistant to the bishop Rebekah, and national bishop Susan; and our companion congregations of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Chetwynd Shared Ministry in Chetwynd and the pastors and leaders that serve their community; and for Christ Lutheran Church in Chilliwack and their pastor Dean Andersen. Lord, in your abundant mercy, **hear our prayer**.

God of blessing, you have looked upon us with favour and showed us mercy in creating a planet for us to live in from generation to generation. Strengthen us in our care for all that you have made, that the holiness of your name can be seen and heard always throughout all of creation. Lord, in your abundant mercy, **hear our prayer**.

God of strength, you humble the mighty and lift up the lowly as you show us the equity of your justice. Instill the wisdom of your love and grace to all world leaders and politicians, that we might together learn to live in harmony and peace in spite of difference and diversity. We pray especially for the areas of the world facing war, civil unrest, and political turmoil that your hand of healing might rest on those lands. We also pray for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; that their journey here might begin soon. Lord, in your abundant mercy, **hear our prayer**.

God our aid, you come to us with the promise of mercy, and you deliver us from our ailments and restore us into wholeness. Be with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love would continue to shine around and through us. Especially we pray for Bryan; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; William; Chris; Walter; Larry; Piet; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... Lord, in your abundant mercy, **hear our prayer**.

God of eternal promise, you welcome us to live in community with you and all the saints, and you bring us joy and peace in relationship forever. Inspire us with the faith of the past, that we can together move into the future with hope. Lord, in your abundant mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your abundant grace and mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**.

## **PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

## MEAL

### **DIALOGUE** (p. 14)

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.**

### **PREFACE**

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 has showed us your grace and mercy in surprising ways again and again, lifting us up to join with the choirs of angels, hosts of heaven, and the church on earth, in praising your name with this unending hymn:

### **HOLY, HOLY, HOLY** (p. 14)

#### **THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

Holy One, the beginning and the end, the giver of life:

Blessed are you for the birth of creation.

Blessed are you in the darkness and in the light.

Blessed are you for your promises.

Blessed are you in the hopes and dreams of all.

Blessed are you for your Son Jesus,  
the Word made flesh.

For on the night that he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he took the bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it, saying:

“Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

Then after they ate, he took the 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 bread and cup that we see God in our midst blessing us and lifting us up, even as we ponder the mystery of our faith:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

With this bread and cup  
we remember your Word dwelling among us,  
full of grace and truth.

We long for your Spirit to come among us, to bless this meal, and to awaken us to faithfully serve you and neighbour with joy and peace.

All praise and glory are yours, O God, Word incarnate, Power of the Most High,  
one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

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

Gathered into recognizing God with us, 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**

Taste and see God present with us all.

**Thanks be to God.**

## **COMMUNION**

**COMMUNION HYMNS:** Lamb of God (p. 17)

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (#257) verses 1-4

Wait for the Lord (#262)

## **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Holy God, again you have fed us with your Word and nourished us with your grace, and you strengthen us to be your hands and feet in the world. Make yourself known to us, that we might recognize your abundant mercies and reflect them to all people, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## **SENDING**

### **BLESSING**

God our Creator bless you and keep you,  
God the Christ shine on you and be gracious unto you,  
God of care and love look upon you with favour and grace, and grant to you all the peace that surpasses all understanding, now and forever. **Amen.**

**SENDING HYMN:** Joy to the World (#267)

### **DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, be patient and strong, for God is with us.

**Thanks be to God.**