



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Second Sunday of Advent

December 4, 2022

Tree of Life

At the heart of our Advent preparation stands John the Baptist, who calls us to repent and make a new beginning. As the darkness increases we turn toward the approaching light of Christ. For Christians he is the root of Jesse, the righteous judge who welcomes all, especially the poor and meek of the earth. We wait with hope for that day when the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and there will be no more hurt or destruction. From the Lord's table we are sent in the spirit of John the Baptist to proclaim that in Christ the kingdom of God has come near.

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 hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP AND LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH:

We gather in the name of our God, who grants to us a justice of grace and a righteousness of mercy, providing for us all that we need to prosper in our faith. And we worship this God for all that God has done in teaching us how to live with each other and revealing to us all the joy and peace in community. And as we light two candles on this wreath, may we be enlightened by God's grace and welcome as we have been welcomed, this day and forevermore.

Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah (#240) verses 1, 2

Blessed be the name of this God of Israel, and may God's glory fill the earth forever. **Amen.**
Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: Beneath the Tree of Life (p. 3) verses 1, 3, 4, 5

GREETING

May the forgiving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the steadfast love of God, and the welcoming communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

HYMN OF PRAISE (p. 6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of all times and places, stir up in us the power of your Spirit, that we might see in abundance your blessing and presence in all of creation, for you live and reign among us, Maker, Saviour, and Giver of Life, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 11:1-10

A reading from Isaiah.

Isaiah describes the coming of a future, ideal ruler who will renew David's royal line (the stump of Jesse). Gifted by the spirit of God, this ruler will reign with perfect justice. Enmity and danger will be restored to harmony and peaceful coexistence.

¹A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

²The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;

⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
⁷The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
⁹They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.
¹⁰On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire
of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19

¹Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to the king's son;
²**that he may rule your people righteously
and the poor with justice;**
³that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
⁴**Let him defend the needy among the people,
rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor.**
⁵May he live as long as the sun and moon endure,
from one generation to another.
⁶**Let him come down like rain upon the mown field,
like showers that water the earth.**
⁷In his time may the righteous flourish;
and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.
¹⁸**Blessed are you, LORD God, the God of Israel;
you alone do wondrous deeds!**
¹⁹And blessed be your glorious name forever,
and may all the earth be filled with your glory. Amen. Amen.

SECOND READING: Romans 15:4-13

A reading from Romans.

God's promise to include Gentiles within the circle of God's blessed people has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christians live out their unity by welcoming and encouraging each other just as Christ has welcomed them into God's family.

⁴Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to your name”;

¹⁰and again he says,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;

¹¹and again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him”;

¹²and again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 10)

GOSPEL: Matthew 3:1-12

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Just before Jesus begins his public ministry, John the Baptist appears, calling people to mend their ways and speaking of a powerful one who is to come.

¹In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the ax is lying

at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

O God, may our Word open our ears, your Spirit open our eyes, and your love open our hearts, that we be receptive to your instruction and empowered by your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This snow, am I right? I know, normally our weather is pretty mild, and we here in the Lower Mainland really pride ourselves with that. And really, we get this kind of snow at least once a year (ish). So when this does happen, do we really have to act like we've never seen snow before? Seriously. Every year(ish) we get this dump of snow, and people still are caught off guard and unprepared. Every year there is at least one horrible day in terms of road conditions, and people still say they don't need proper winter tires. Every year our prayers of a no-snow season go unanswered, and yet people claim that they've never seen anything like it. Uh, how about try last year?

I get that people are at different levels of comfort when it comes to snow driving. I get that people have different experiences and training and practice. I get that people come from different climates and actually and literally haven't seen anything like what we get. It's just that... c'mon now seriously? Can we just collectively learn to be better? All I ask is for just a bit of preparation and common sense.

I mean you can either learn how to drive in the snow, or don't drive on snow days. Leave work early. Take the bus. Call an Uber. Do something to minimize the inconveniences that you might cause by getting stuck in the snow.

When we get snow like this (at least once a year), I notice how divided people are. It's like the whole city gets split in two: those who can drive in winter conditions, and those who were born in Vancouver. I know, that's a huge assumption to make but it seems so true doesn't it? Those who were born here, with the exception of I think only me, drive like they wouldn't know what snow is even if it hit them on the side of their barn. And this divide seems as impassible as the Alex Fraser bridge on Tuesday night. Once you tell people that you're born here, those assumptions fly and you're painted as the worst driver ever when it comes to snow.

This sort of line that we draw and assumptions we make about people we know little about isn't anything new at all. Sure, it might not be around driving or where you're born, but it could be around the colour of your skin, the age group or generation you belong to, who your parents are or the kind of upbringing you had, your sexual orientation, or even what religion you put your faith in. Depending on what side you're on, you could be susceptible to making or receiving these assumptions, you could be labelled as something that you aren't like terrorist or

bible thumper; accused of something you didn't do like stealing or causing a ruckus; or called something that you aren't like hypocrite or brood of vipers...

Yeah, so it seems even John the baptizer wasn't above this way of thinking, this segregating of the worthy and the non, this line drawing in the sand between us and them.

But wait, this is John the baptizer, one of the main characters of the biblical narrative, one of the formational pillars of our faith, Jesus' own cousin. Shouldn't he, of all people, be above this? Shouldn't he know better? Shouldn't his description of these Pharisees and Sadducees be accurate and not an assumption?

You'd think, right? I mean we know all about these guys, their hypocrisy, their pompous and pretentious demeanour, their holier-than-thou attitudes. If John didn't call them a brood of vipers, we certainly would have. But is that fair? Can we really make that sort of assessment of them? Is this not more drawing lines in the sand?

Because really, this is like the first time they're mentioned in the gospel according to Matthew. While the early readers of this text would probably know of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they would have seen them with respect and honour. It's probably not fair to make these assumptions of them this early in the game. If we look at the context, at this point what have they done wrong? Why are there assumptions about them already? Do they deserve to be called a brood of vipers?

I mean, all they did was come to be baptized like everyone else. All they did was try to be obedient to this call to repentance. All they did was do what they thought was right. We might make assumptions of their motives and reasoning, but that doesn't mean that we're correct. We can call them hypocrites all we want, but the truth of the matter is, so are we.

During the snow storm earlier this week, I couldn't help but cringe at the things that I saw. There was this kid on the news who decided to just park his car on the side of Royal Oak like halfway up the hill, because he said he "knew his car wouldn't make it all the way up". So if he knew that, why did even go as far as he did and block traffic? Then I saw another guy who was a bit frustrated with the traffic so he started weaving in and around people until he spun out, slammed into the curb so hard that he broke his car and now had to wait for a tow truck, blocking even more traffic. Then there was this dork who was just driving his daughter home from the dentist and somehow lost control, locked up his brakes, and just narrowly missed two cars and a pedestrian and was only stopped by running up on the curb.

Ok, I admit that last one was me but in my defense it was really slippery out there. I mean seriously, I've never seen anything like it.

You know, we often make assumptions, call names, and draw lines, but much of the time we aren't much better. Sure, maybe we don't lose control on the road in the snow, but I'm sure we lose control in other areas in life. Maybe we aren't unprepared for the conditions and took the time to properly plan and get ready, but I'm sure we find ourselves unprepared for other things at the expense of others. Maybe we can drive and navigate the wintery roads, but I'm sure that there are other things that we aren't good at and wouldn't want others to point them out and put us down for them.

The interesting thing about John and the Pharisees and Sadducees is that the text doesn't say that he refuses them baptism. We aren't told that he turns them around and tells them to come back once they've cleaned up their attitudes and gotten rid of their hypocrisy. We just don't know what happened. But I'd like to think that he welcomed them and baptized them anyway. I'd like to think that John saw past his assumptions and saw this brood of vipers as God's beloved as well. I'd like to think that Jesus' cousin, this formational pillar of our faith, was able to erase the lines that he drew in the sand and humbly followed the call to love and accept others in grace.

I think this is what Isaiah was talking about when he said how the wolves would live with the lambs and the cows will graze with the bears and how the predators and the prey will learn to live in harmony. This is what the author of Romans meant with the Gentiles and Israelites having and following the same hope. This is why John talks about this Messiah who will come and change us to be more patient, more understanding, and more welcoming for the salvation of the world.

For Jesus comes with a winnowing fork, not to separate the saints from the sinners, but to take away our assumptions, attitudes, and obstacles that block us from seeing each other as equal partners in the gospel. Jesus comes to gather the wheat into his granary, not by selecting those who are good enough and deserving to be included, but by purifying all people through forgiveness and grace. Jesus enters the world and baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, not to condemn, but to save.

Save us from all that stands in our way of true community. Save us from our social constructs telling us what is right and wrong. Save us from the assumptions of each other that tell us that we are anything but beloved children of God, good driver in the snow or not.

In this season of Advent, may our hope in the presence of Christ lead us to tear down the walls and erase the lines we have between us, and learn to live together in harmony and peace, accepting each other as equal sinners, equal partners in Christ, and equally redeemed and saved by the love of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry (#249)

CREED (p. 12)

With all of God's beloved people, 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 to live in peace with God and neighbour, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with “by your righteous mercy, O God,” and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. By your righteous mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, may your justice of grace and peace reign in our hearts, that we might be able to see one another as you do, as beloved members of the body of Christ. And may our actions and ministry reflect that truth unto all the world. We pray this 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 Mount Zion Lutheran Church in Smithers and the pastors and leaders that serve there; and for our own Grace Lutheran Church here in Burnaby and all the work that we do for our neighbourhood and city. By your righteous mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, the mountains and seas that you have made bring a prosperity of love, revealing to all your presence and abundant blessing. May we see you in all of creation, that our care for this planet be responsible and faithful. We hold up in prayer all those who live in areas of harsh weather and natural disasters and that all might find shelter from any damaging elements. By your righteous mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you call us to defend the needy and rescue the poor, and you give us tools to live peaceably throughout the nations. Equip all world leaders, politicians, and people of influence with your wisdom, that all people might one day learn to live in harmony without the threat of violence or war. We pray especially for the nations and areas that continue to be unsafe that all might find protection and security. And we especially pray for those that we’ve sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children, that they might begin their journey soon. By your righteous mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you declare us as righteous and you allow us to flourish in your abundant peace found in your healing and wholeness. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, and make your equitable love apparent to us all. Especially we pray for Bryan; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; William; Chris; Walter; Larry; Piet; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
By your righteous mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your name be blessed forever as the earth is filled with your glory and you welcome us all to live with you and all the saints in your kingdom. May their lives of faith always be remembered by and inspiring to us all, that we might continue to work of your Spirit in the world. By your righteous mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your endless and abundant love and redemption, shown to us by 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 leads us all into equitable love and community, joining us with the choirs of angels, the cherubim and seraphim, the 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 God, mighty and merciful, you bring to us the joy of being your children, connected by your love and brought together by your grace to live with each other in community in your kingdom, where we see the value and identity you give to each of us, reminding us that in you we are made to be worthy of your redeeming and salvation. For in the fullness of time you sent to us Jesus, your Son, to live among us as one of us as an example of how we can live in harmony in spite of difference and disparity, lifting up the wisdom of your peace and the equity of your welcome.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends 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."

Then after they ate, he 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 through the gift of this bread and cup that we are reminded of how we are truly connected and equal, together regarded as God's beloved, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

O God, bring to us this wisdom and may it reign through our communities and congregations. Bring to us your equitable love, that it might ring through our hearts and relationships. Bring to us your Spirit, that we all be blessed by your love and grace and always remember all that you do in lifting us up out of our sin and into your arms of mercy. Thus, all honour and glory be to you, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ with whom we partake in this holy meal, by the power of your Spirit, living and reigning together as one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 17)

Joined together to be God's holy people living in equity, 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's love given to us all.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 17)

There's a Voice in the Wilderness (#255)

Wait for the Lord (#262)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give you thanks for once again feeding us with your Word and truth and nourishing us with your love and grace. Empower us as your people in the world, that our actions and ministry be pleasing to you, proclaiming your truth to all in all that we do, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God of love fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you might abound in hope through the teachings of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Prepare the Royal Highway (#264)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, be encouraged by God's grace and mercy to live in harmony with all people.

Thanks be to God.