

PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH
ADVENT 3 - RETURN TO THE PROMISE
Reverend John R. Hanson
Sunday, December 12, 2021, 8:00 & 10:30 a.m.

PRELUDE

J. Hanson

INTRODUCTION The third week of Advent continues the journey with John the Baptist, focusing on his preaching and proclamation. It is ironic that this season has become one in which the inequalities and injustices of our world are so starkly revealed. But this reality also gives us an opportunity to hear John's call more strongly and to see more clearly how we are to respond. May our worship this week challenge us to face the great injustices in our world and the small injustices in our hearts.

CELEBRATION SINGERS

THEME AND VERSE (Light Advent Candles)

Give thanks to the LORD! Praise his name! Tell the whole world what he has done—his mighty acts on our behalf. Sing to the LORD, for he has done wonderful things for us! We raise our hearts and voices! We shout and sing your praise! For great is the Holy One who lives among us!

Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. (Philippians 4:4)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION God is good. **All the time.**

GOSPEL: Luke 3:7-18 (The Message) *John confronts the people about corruption and injustice and challenges them to change their cultural practices. When they ask what they must do, he calls them to generosity, honesty, and compassion. When the people wonder whether he might be the Messiah, John tells them that one is coming after him who will baptize them with the Holy Spirit.*

When crowds of people came out for baptism because it was the popular thing to do, John exploded: "Brood of snakes! What do you think you're doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snake-skins is going to deflect God's judgment? It's your life that must change, not your skin. And don't think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as 'father.' Being a child of Abraham is neither here nor there—children of Abraham are a dime a dozen. God can make children from stones if he wants. What counts is your life. Is it green and

blossoming? Because if it's deadwood, it goes on the fire."

The crowd asked him, "Then what are we supposed to do?" "If you have two coats, give one away," he said. "Do the same with your food."

Tax men also came to be baptized and said, "Teacher, what should we do?" He told them, "No more extortion—collect only what is required by law."

Soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He told them, "No shakedowns, no blackmail—and be content with your rations."

The interest of the people by now was building. They were all beginning to wonder, "Could this John be the Messiah?"

But John intervened: "I'm baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out.

He's going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned."

There was a lot more of this—words that gave strength to the people, words that put heart in them.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION All the time.

God is good!

HYMN

"Borning Cry"

Blue # 770

I was there to hear your borning cry, I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized, to see your life unfold.
I was there when you were but a child, with a faith to suit you well;
In a blaze of light you wandered off to find where demons dwell.

When you heard the wonder of the Word, I was there to cheer you on;
You were raised to praise the living Lord, to whom you now belong.
If you find someone to share your time and you join your hearts as one,
I'll be there to make your verses rhyme from dusk 'till rising sun.

In the middle ages of your life, not too old, no longer young,
I'll be there to guide you through the night, complete what I've begun.
When the evening gently closes in, and you shut your weary eyes,
I'll be there as I have always been with just one more surprise.

I was there to hear your borning cry, I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized, to see your life unfold.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

We gather together to worship

in the name of the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Surely God is our salvation; let us trust and be not afraid.

Lord, we do not begin to live in right relationship. We do not offer you prayer and supplication. We worry about things of this world and make ourselves the focus.

Sometimes we are at peace if we have what we want, yet our sisters and brothers are in need. Still, we are neither ready nor concerned with judgment and so do not ask "What then should we do?" Rather foolishly we rely on our "Christian" affiliation. Our sin is before you, Lord, save us.

Sing and shout, rejoice with all your heart. The Lord takes away the judgment against us. God gives the Son, Jesus Christ, to take away the sin of the world. Our sins are forgiven, we shall no longer fear evil or disaster. Our lives may now carry the worthy fruit of our honest repentance.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit! Amen.

SERVICE OF HOLY BAPTISM (10:30)

WELCOME
SHARING OF THE PEACE

CHILDREN'S SERMON

"We have permission..."

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, in you alone can we trust. Even though we have sinned and rebelled, you have redeemed us as your people, a remnant from every tribe, tongue, and nation. You are our strength and our song, Lord. Grant your Spirit to remind us of the joy of your salvation. Turn us in faith to proclaim of the glorious works you have done. Help us sing with joy for you promised that you will be with us. Amen.

READING: Zephaniah 3:14-20 (The Message)

A call for God's people to rejoice because he has restored and forgiven his people. God now lives in the midst of them, bringing them joy and healing and including all those existing on the fringe of the community.

So, sing, Daughter Zion! Raise the rafters, Israel! Daughter Jerusalem, be happy! celebrate! God has reversed his judgments against you and sent your enemies off chasing their tails. From now on, God is Israel's king, in charge at the center. There's nothing to fear from evil ever again!

Jerusalem will be told: "Don't be afraid. Dear Zion, don't despair. Your God is present among you, a strong Warrior there to save you. Happy to have you back, he'll calm you with his love and delight you with his songs.

"The accumulated sorrows of your exile will dissipate. I, your God, will get rid of them

for you. You've carried those burdens long enough. At the same time, I'll get rid of all those who've made your life miserable. I'll heal the maimed; I'll bring home the homeless. In the very countries where they were hated they will be venerated.

On Judgment Day I'll bring you back home—a great family gathering! You'll be famous and honored all over the world. You'll see it with your own eyes—all those painful partings turned into reunions!" God's Promise.

READING: Philippians 4:4-7 (The Message)

Despite being in prison, Paul is remarkably upbeat as he writes this letter. Here, he urges his friends in Philippi to pray and give thanks, to trust God with all their worries and concerns with the hope they will experience God's joy and peace just as he did.

Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!

Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your

worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

HYMN

“The Advent of Our God”

Green # 368 (tune) # 22 (text)

The advent of our God shall be our theme for prayer;
Come, let us meet him on the road and place for him prepare.

The everlasting Son Incarnate stoops to be,
Himself the servant's form puts on to set his people free.

All glory to the Son, who comes to set us free,
With Father, Spirit, ever one through all eternity.

CCLI Song #3341737 CCLI License # 1713417

SERMON - Do something! To be made one with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is more than an invitation. It gives us permission to respond to this union as a church.

HYMN

“Baptized in Water”

Green # 518 (tune)

Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit, cleansed by the blood of Christ our King:
Heirs of salvation, trusting his promise, faithfully now God's praise we sing.

Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit, dead in the tomb with Christ our King:
One with his rising, freed and forgiven, thankfully now God's praise we sing.

Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit, marked with the sign of Christ our King:
Born of one Father, we are his children, joyfully now God's praise we sing.

CCLI Song #2700434 CCLI License # 1713417

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

THE LORD’S PRAYER

BLESSING & PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Lord God, we come to your table of grace timidly or blindly, weighed down by the errors of our past. We come expecting judgement, yet we thankfully discover the wonder of your love, the abundance that comes from your power, and the joy that can be found in sharing the Good News of Jesus, who comes to save every tribe, nation, and tongue. Amen.

BENEDICTION & SENDING

Rejoice in the Lord always, show gentleness to all, do not be anxious, make your needs known to God by prayer with thanksgiving; and the peace of God guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

We live as servants of God in Jesus’ name.

And may the blessing of our merciful God go with us and the blessing of his son, who shows us a way to live re-shaped in his love. And may the blessing of the living Holy Spirit joyfully empower us to live out this renewed life in Christ. Amen?

Amen! We go in Christ’s name to love and serve!

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Worship, as an action, continues to change.

Use this space to guide your thoughts as the Spirit may lead you.

Use this time to center your distractions in order to help activate your worship.

John's message, which challenges us to live with justice and compassion, is the central focus of this week. The same basic message resonates through all of the passages. In Zephaniah, the song of restoration speaks of God's restoration and forgiveness but makes a point of embracing those who are vulnerable and marginalized specifically in the vision of God's grace. Similarly, Isaiah's message speaks of God's salvation and the rejoicing that comes to those whom God has restored. In Philippians, the believers are called to a life of rejoicing, prayer and thanksgiving because of God's nearness, and the assurance is offered that this life brings unspeakable peace. Finally, in the Gospel, John makes it clear that God's coming is not just a joyous event in which we are accepted and forgiven with no cost on our part. Rather, God's people are called to change their lives in accordance with God's saving purpose, essentially becoming agents of God's salvation to one another. This is the message we need to hear this week. Yes, God is always coming to us, bringing salvation and life. But this coming calls for a response from us in which we commit to lives that share grace and salvation, that empower and restore one another through acts of justice and compassion. If we really believe that God's Reign has come in Christ, we cannot help but recognize the need for this to change and direct our lives.

Who are the voiceless, excluded ones in your community? Who are the ones that a John the Baptist would call you to serve and include? What practices or ways of living would John challenge you on? What uses of your wealth might he question? Is there a way, this week, that your worship can overflow to the poorer communities and people around you? Can you use this Advent season to develop long term programs or strategies for embodying Christ's coming to the people who most need to hear it in your neighborhood, and perhaps the world? As we prepare for the season of incarnation and explore what it means that God's Reign is always coming to us, we need to make this about more than just happy ideas. It is only as God's Reign becomes the focus of our lives that we can really enjoy – and share – the abundant life that Jesus brings. This is not just about giving money or creating new charities. It's really about building relationships with those who need friends and caring networks more than handouts. It's about realizing that we're all connected, and that what dehumanizes one, dehumanizes us all. Perhaps, this year, instead of using this season as an escape from the world's struggles, we can allow it to draw us more deeply into connectedness and mutual care.

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