

Holy Eucharist

December 10, 2023

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85887946777?pwd=eig4MEdsMUh6clV6b2dUblFOQ3I2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 858 8794 6777

Passcode: 782611

Advent 2B

Prelude

On this second Sunday of Advent, we watch and wait. We wait for God to send divine love and light into our dark world. God's light comes through Jesus, who became a human being—incarnate-- just like you and me. He was born to show us the way back to God's divine love and light. We prepare ourselves to greet that day of joy and delight.

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.



All stand as they are able

Opening Hymn

Hymnal 75

There's a voice in the wilderness crying



1 There's a voice in the wil - der - ness cry - ing, a
2 O _____ Zi - on, that bring - est good tid - ings, get thee
3 but the word of our God _____ en - du - reth, the _____



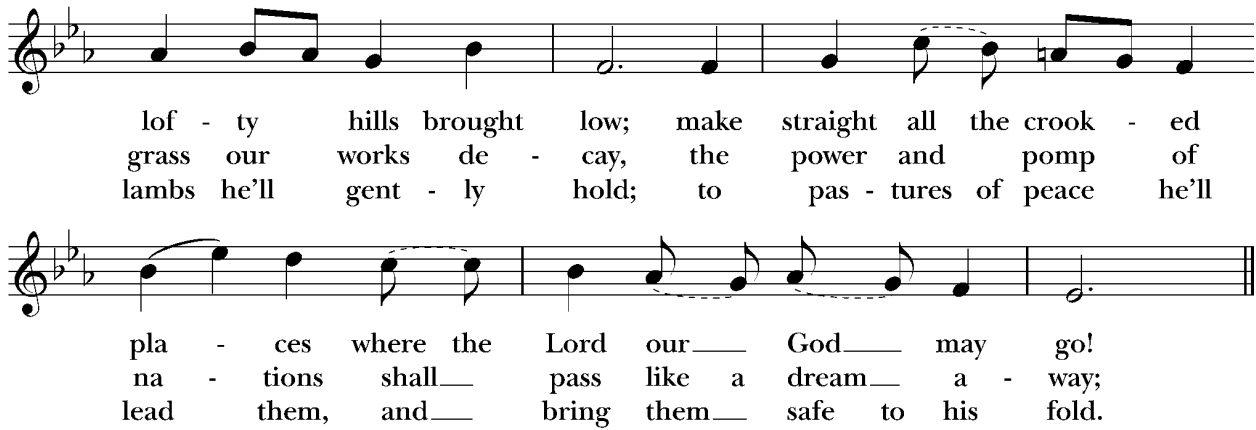
call from the ways un - trod: Pre - pare in the des - ert a
up to the heights and sing! Pro - claim to a des - o - late
arm of the Lord is strong; he stands in the midst _____ of



high - way, a high - way for our God! The _____
peo - ple the com - ing of their King. Like the
na - tions, and he will right the wrong. He shall



val - leys shall be ex - alt - ed, the
flowers of the field they _____ per - ish, like
feed his _____ flock like a shep - herd, the



lof - ty hills brought low; make straight all the crook - ed
 grass our works de - cay, the power and pomp of
 lambs he'll gent - ly hold; to pas - tures of peace he'll
 pla - ces where the Lord our God may go!
 na - tions shall pass like a dream a - way;
 lead them, and bring them safe to his fold.

Presider Blessed are you, holy and living One.
People **You come to your people and set them free.**

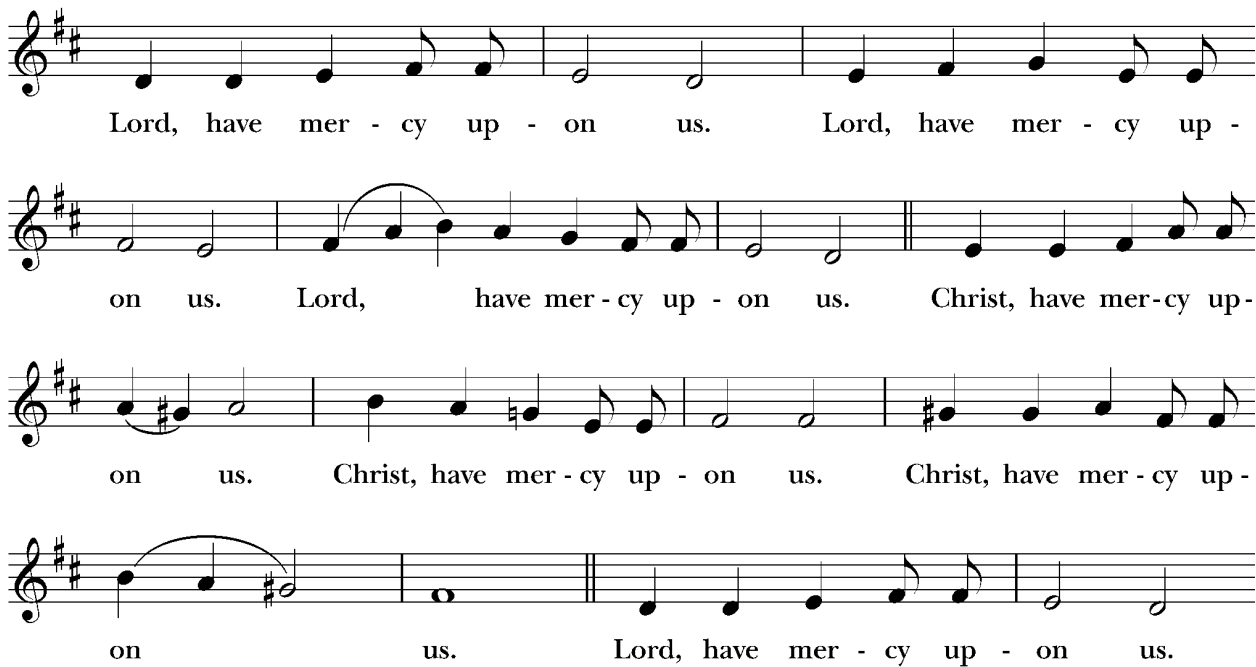
The Presider begins the Collect for Purity

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: **Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

The following is sung, all standing as they are able

Kyrie: Lord, have mercy

Hymnal S-91



Lord, have mer - cy up - on us. Lord, have mer - cy up -
 on us. Lord, have mer - cy up - on us. Christ, have mer - cy up -
 on us. Christ, have mer - cy up - on us. Christ, have mer - cy up -
 on us. Lord, have mer - cy up - on us.



Collect of the Day

Presider The Lord be with you.
People **And also with you.**
Presider Let us pray.

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever **Amen.**

All sit.

First Reading

Isaiah 40:1-11

A Reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

¹“Comfort, O comfort my people,”
says your God.

²“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD’s hand
double for all her sins.”

³A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

⁶A voice says, “Cry out!”
And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;

surely the people are grass.
8The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.
9Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
“Here is your God!”
10See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
11He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Reader The Word of the Lord.
People **Thanks be to God.**

Remain seated

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

to be prayed responsively

1You have been gracious to your land, O LORD; *
you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.
2You have forgiven the iniquity of your people *
and blotted out all their sins.
8**I will listen to what the Holy One is saying, ***
for God is speaking peace to the faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to God.
9**Truly, salvation is very near to those who fear the Holy One, ***
that God’s glory may dwell in our land.
10Mercy and truth have met together; *
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
11Truth shall spring up from the earth, *
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.
12**The LORD will indeed grant prosperity, ***
and our land will yield its increase.
13**Righteousness shall go before the Holy One, ***
and peace shall be a pathway for God’s feet.

Second Reading

2 Peter 3:8-15a

A Reading from the Second letter of Peter.

⁸Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

¹¹Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹²waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ^{15a}and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People **Thanks be to God.**

All stand as they are able.

Sequence Hymn

Hymnal 67

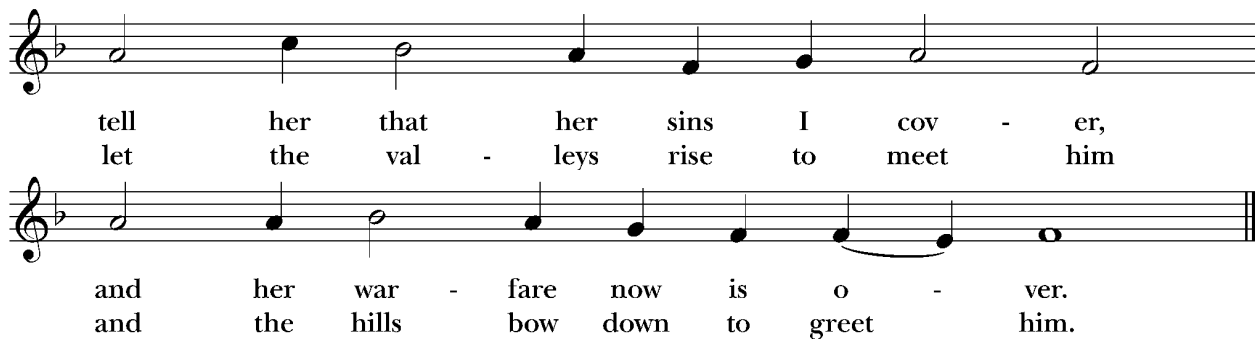
Comfort, comfort ye my people

1 Com - fort, com - fort ye my peo - ple, speak ye peace, thus
2 Hark, the voice of one that cri - eth in the des - ert

saith our God; com - fort those who sit in dark - ness
far and near, call - ing us to new re - pent - ance

mourn - ing 'neath their sor - rows' load. Speak ye to Je -
since the king - dom now is here. Oh, that warn - ing

ru - sa - lem of the peace that waits for them;
cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way;



Holy Gospel

Mark 1:1-8

Gospeller The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to Mark.
People **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

¹The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”



Gospeller The Gospel of the Lord.
People **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

Sermon

The Rev. Canon Ellen Ekevag

All then stand as they are able.

Nicene Creed

Presider Let us affirm the faith of the Church using the words of the Nicene Creed.

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,**

maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

All remain standing as they are able.

Prayers of the People

Presider Sisters and brothers, children of God, let us lift up our voices to God in strength, saying, Be patient with us and prepare us, Lord.

Intercessor Together as your Church, we long to see your face. Speak to us, Lord, as we walk through the wilderness, listening for the sound of your voice. Give our leaders patience, wisdom, and a heart for your will. In your mercy, **be patient with us and prepare us, Lord.**

Silence is kept

We pray for all who govern, especially Joseph, our president, and for the Congress and courts of this land. Guide the leaders of all the nations as they work for the welfare of their people and the good of all. In your mercy, **be patient with us and prepare us, Lord.**

Silence is kept

Awaken us to the suffering of people near us and those far from us. Call forth in us a spirit of generosity and kindness. Equip us to respond to their needs. Arouse in us a sense of urgency to demonstrate your Good News in our lives and voice it, that all may hear. Make us messengers of your love. Accept our thankfulness for, and teach us to follow in the way of, your never-ending generosity [remembering _____ and any blessing you wish to name now]. In your mercy, **be patient with us and prepare us, Lord.**

Silence is kept

Holy One, you are ruler of all things in heaven and earth. Hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all a burning heart for our congregation, and all things necessary for our common life, and the embrace of the ministries with which you have gifted everyone. Bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church. In your mercy, **be patient with us and prepare us, Lord.**

Silence is kept

Holy One, we rely on, and give thanks for, your divine wisdom, knowledge and understanding. We know that, because of your Holy Spirit's guidance, we can make the right decisions in line with your will and purpose for this parish. We ask for the Spirit of discernment, that we each may be enabled to make those decisions that will lead us to the serving of your church in this place. In your mercy, **be patient with us and prepare us, Lord.**

Silence is kept

Lover of our souls, you continue to mold us in your image and hold us in your hands. We lift up all those who are facing illness [remembering _____ and any others you wish to name now]. Bring healing, comfort, and peace to their bodies. Calm their fears and let them experience the healing power of your love. Lend skill and compassion to their healers, and bless the means of their care. Give them such confidence in the power of your grace that, even when they are afraid, they may put their whole trust in you.

Silence is kept

We ask you to comfort those who have lost hope, who struggle with anxiety about the future, who live in fear. Bring healing to those for whom we now pray [especially _____ and any others you wish to name now].

We pray for those who have died, [remembering _____] that their memories may be blessings in our lives. In your mercy, **be patient with us and prepare us, Lord.**

Silence is kept

Presider Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; for this we pray. **Amen.**

Confession of Sin

The Presider says to the people

Jesus said, "The first commandment is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." *Mark 12:29-31*

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbors.

All remain standing, or kneel, as they are able.

Silence may be kept.

Minister and People

**Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.**

A Priest stands and says

Almighty God have mercy on you, + forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

All then stand as they are able.

Peace

Presider The peace of Christ be always with you.
People **And also with you.**

The Ministers and the People may offer God's peace to one another in the name of the Lord.

The People then are seated.

Announcements

Holy Communion

Representatives of the congregation bring the people's offerings of bread and wine, and money or other gifts, to the Presider.

The people stand while the offerings are presented and placed on the Altar

Offertory Hymn

Doxology

**Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

The people remain standing as they are able

Great Thanksgiving

Presider The Lord be with you.

People **And also with you.**

Presider Lift up your hearts.

People **We lift them to the Lord.**

Presider Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

The Presider proceeds

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Because you sent your beloved Son to redeem us from sin and death, and to make us heirs in him of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever to proclaim the glory of your Name:

Sanctus

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

The people continue to stand, or kneel, as they are able.

The Presider continues

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.**

The Presider continues

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them **+** by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him.

Sanctify us also **+** that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. **AMEN.**

The Presider then continues

As our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to pray:

**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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

A period of silence is kept.

The Presider says

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;
Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.

These are the Gifts of God.
And we are the people of God.

All are welcome to receive Holy Communion.

When all have received, the Presider then says

Let us pray.

Presider and People

**Eternal God, heavenly Father,
you have graciously accepted us as living members
of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ,
and you have fed us with spiritual food
in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.
Send us now into the world in peace,
and grant us strength and courage
to love and serve you
with gladness and singleness of heart;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Blessing

A priest blesses the people, saying

May Almighty God, by whose providence our Savior Christ came among us in great humility, sanctify you with the light of his blessing and set you free from all sin. **Amen.**

May he whose second Coming in power and great glory we await, make you steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love. **Amen.**

May you, who rejoice in the first Advent of our Redeemer, at his second Advent be rewarded with unending life. **Amen.**

And may the blessing of the Holy One who made you,
†Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer be with you today and always. **Amen.**

Concluding Hymn

On Jordan's bank

Hymnal 76

1 On Jor - dan's bank the Bap - tist's cry an -
2 Then cleansed be ev - ery breast from sin; make
3 For thou art our sal - va - tion, Lord, our
5 All praise, e - ter - nal Son, to thee, whose

1 noun - ces that the Lord is nigh; a - wake and heark - en,
2 straight the way for God with - in, and let each heart pre -
3 re - fuge, and our great re - ward; with - out thy grace we
5 ad - vent doth thy peo - ple free; whom with the Fa - ther

The musical score consists of two systems of music. Each system has a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The music is in a 3/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are printed below the treble clef staff, with line numbers 1, 2, 3, and 5 indicating different verses. The first system covers the first four lines of lyrics, and the second system covers the last four lines.

1 for he brings glad tid - ings of the King of kings.
 2 pare a home where such a might - y guest may come.
 3 waste a - way like flowers that with - er and de - cay.
 5 we a - dore and Ho - ly Spi - rit ev - er - more.

Dismissal

Minister And now, my brothers and sisters, I bid you go out as did St Barnabas, the Encourager. Go out with joy and in peace, to love and serve our Lord.

People **Thanks be to God.**

Postlude

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This week in prayer

Please remember these persons and congregations in your prayers this week:

Our Bishops Bonnie, Michael, Justin, Moises (TEC); Elizabeth, Donald and Craig (ELCA)
and for all priests, deacons, Ministry Teams, and those in formation

Anglican Cycle of Prayer:

December 10 Eglise Anglicane du Rwanda

Diocese of Michigan Cycle of Prayer:

December 10 Christ Church, Detroit; St Thomas', Trenton; St Paul & St Luke, San Isidro, DR

St Barnabas Cycle of Prayer: Mike, Josie, Henry, Leslie

and our continuing prayers for: Bob, Carlos, Jim M, Mardi, Pat, Robert, Selenah

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Faith in Action provides leadership in collecting donations to support households in need in the Chelsea and Dexter areas. They are in need of our continuing help. You may bring your donations to FIA, or to Nancy who will see that they get there. **If you bring food directly to FIA**, please let Nancy know, so she can continue to keep our records of donation. If you write a check, please make it to *Faith In Action*. The **next Food Drive at the church** is NEXT WEEK, **December 17**. Please contribute as generously as you can.

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Upcoming Commemorations

- December 10 Karl Barth: Pastor and Theologian, 1968; and,
Thomas Merton: Contemplative and Writer, 1968
- 11 Frederick Howden, Jr., Priest & Chaplain of the Armed Forces, 1941
- 12 Francis de Sales & Jane de Chantal, Vowed Religious, 1622 & 1641
- 13 Lucy of Syracuse, Martyr, 304
- 14 John of the Cross, Mystic and Monastic Reformer, 1591
- 15 John Horden: Bishop and Missionary in Canada, 1893; and,
Robert McDonald: Priest, 1913
- 16 Ralph Adams Cram, 1942, and Richard Upjohn, 1878, Architects; and,
John LaFarge, Artist, 1910

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Advent 2B December 10, 2023

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

During Advent and Christmas, we will be using study prompts and other activities tied to the sermon for the week. Read the sermon aloud and follow-up with spoken responses to the two questions at the end.

Comfort, Comfort

The first sentences of the Old Testament reading will be familiar to many as the opening words of Handel's masterpiece, *The Messiah*. "Comfort Ye, Comfort Ye my people,' says your God!" It would be difficult to estimate the millions of people who have heard orchestras, soloists, and choirs proclaiming these words of hope and the promise of delivery from the oppression, despair, and sin of the world.

The Messiah has been called the most influential and widely performed oratorio of all time. Opera, as we know it, has strong roots in Italian culture, but the oratorio is a very English form of music. Oratorios are somewhat like opera in that they are dramatic works, but they are performed in concert, without costumes or staging. Most are based on Old Testament stories. One of the important aspects that sets *The Messiah* apart from other oratorios is that it focuses more on meditation than action.

The story of Handel's writing of this work is also inspiring. George Frederic Handel was born in Germany in 1685. His father wanted him to become a lawyer, but as a youth he demonstrated extraordinary musical gifts, mastering several instruments and composing in a variety of styles while still in his teens. He composed music for some of the most important patrons in Europe before settling in England. There, he became London's leading composer and director of Italian opera. He also became interested in the characteristics of English music and eventually abandoned his operatic writing to concentrate on the English oratorio.

After thirty years of popularity and prosperity, Handel found his fame fleeting and more creditors than admirers at his door. A stroke left him with partial paralysis on his left side. He had difficulty sleeping and suffered from rheumatism. He was depressed. Without another musical success, he feared his next home might be the debtor's prison.

In the midst of this dreadful summer of 1741, two critical letters arrived. The first, from the Duke of Devonshire, invited him to Dublin to produce a series of benefit concerts. Proceeds from the concerts would be for the relief of the prisoners in the several jails in the city and for the support of a hospital and an infirmary. The opportunity of a change of scene and a temporary escape from his creditors was an attractive one.

The second letter came from his friend Charles Jennens. Jennens was a somewhat eccentric English landowner who had written some lyrics for Handel in the past. This letter was a compilation of Old and New Testament passages that comprised the story of Christ's birth, crucifixion, resurrection, and future reign.

Handel shut himself in his room and completed the entire oratorio in the incredibly short time of 21 days. Part I, the prophecy and birth of the Messiah, took only seven days to complete.

The first official performance of *The Messiah* took place on April 17, 1742, and was a tremendous success. Handel conducted the work many times in the remaining years of his life, including a performance eight days before his death on April 14, 1759. During his lifetime, *The Messiah* was most often heard in the Easter season. Handel himself conducted an annual performance to benefit the Foundling Hospital in London.

Today, while the oratorio is often performed in its entirety, it is most often heard in Advent, and then frequently limited to the first section and the story of Jesus' birth. This music leaves the concert hall ringing with Isaiah's prophetic words of comfort, release, and God's glorious return to the earth.

Listen, just for a moment to a few of Isaiah's words that have become familiar to so many of us as lyrics from that oratorio:

*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people
Prepare ye the way
Every valley shall be exalted
Then the glory, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed
Behold your God!*

Isaiah is speaking to a captive people. Israel's Babylonian captors have been conquered themselves by Cyrus of Persia. Conquerors have a tendency to gloat over the conquered and Cyrus was no exception. In his case, however, he celebrated his victory by releasing the peoples who had been conquered by the Babylonians. So, when Isaiah spoke of comfort and the glory of the Lord being revealed, captives celebrating their release could readily imagine a return to the better days of their history when God had felt closer.

Compare this to the time of today's Gospel reading. The Book of Mark begins in a time when what is left of Israel, the kingdom of Judea, is once again a conquered people, this time ruled by the Romans. Once again, they hope for God's liberation. Isaiah's words must have been very familiar to them. Indeed, Mark quotes from Isaiah 40, verse 3, in the very reading we have just heard.

John, however, is different from the images Isaiah calls to mind. In his own time, he was something of an eccentric. In today's culture, he would have been a genuine curiosity. His wardrobe was the extreme of the natural fibers fashion trend. Imagine how he must have looked with the roughly textured camel's hair, thrown over his body and belted with a strip of leather. His diet of locusts and wild honey surely conveyed some significant message to his culture. For us, familiar with diets ranging from high to low carbohydrates, the grapefruit diet, liquid diets, high and low protein, vegetarians of various descriptions, and a host of others, bugs and honey still sounds very strange.

If his dress and habits have a rough texture to them, listen to his message. John speaks of repentance rather than comfort. He preaches more baptism for the forgiveness of sins than God's exaltation. John is quite clear that one greater than he is coming. He is the prophet, not the fulfillment. It is the time to get ready.

This is where we find ourselves this second Sunday of Advent. The musical promise of what is to come of Handel's *Messiah* may be mostly confined to churches and concert halls, but those sounds still mingle in our minds with carols on mall loudspeakers and the virtually constant cacophony of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, Santa Claus, The Grinch, White Christmas, and more.

Advent is the season of preparation. The Advent wreath's first candle has already begun to burn lower. Today we light the second. One fourth of the current year's portion of preparation time has already passed. Now, it is time to address some significant questions. What are we preparing for? Who needs to be prepared? Who will prepare them?

What we are preparing for is the easiest question. Song and text make it clear that we are preparing for no less than the kingdom of God. Think of the words we pray so often: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." That is what we prepare for and work for, today, and every day, here, and wherever we are.

Fortunately, we do not need to invest in camel's-hair-and-leather wardrobes, or check the Internet for a good source of locusts and wild honey. We do, however, need to be very clear about who it is who needs to be prepared and who will do the work of preparation. The answer to the first question, of who needs to be prepared, is much bigger for us than it would have been for Isaiah. Isaiah spoke to those who believed themselves to be God's chosen people. Abraham was the one whom God told that his descendants would be a witness to God's presence in the world. They grew from a tribe of nomads into a small nation of shepherders, farmers, and merchants. They may have been the main characters in the familiar stories that make up the Hebrew Scriptures, but they were very minor players in the empires that came and went in that part of the world.

In this time of the global economy, for us, the answer to who needs to be prepared is the whole world. It is everyone included in the instruction to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Now, let us consider the final question. Who will prepare the way? Isaiah and John have become the stuff of legends. The disciples are history. But we are gathered today as a community of believers. We believe that God so loved the world that he sent his only son that

we might have eternal life. We believe that all who choose to truly repent will be forgiven. We believe that nothing of this earth can separate us from the love of God.

Like John, we are not the way, but we know the way. It would seem, therefore, that we are today’s prophets. We are the ones who can give voice to the good news that Christ has died. Christ has risen. And Christ will come again. We know what we are getting ready for. If we do not share that, who will?

You will have a few thoughts about how to do that but here are a few to get you started:

- Remember those persons who introduced you to Christ and the love of God. Remember how they did that. Was it the Bible stories they told, the example of their lives, or something else altogether? Are there places in your life where you can do similar things? Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for their work in preparing you for your place in the kingdom of God.
- Invite a friend to experience the Christ in Christmas at a church event. Special music, a social occasion, or special worship services are just a few possibilities.
- Tell a child the Christmas story.
- Be patient with salesclerks and checkout people. Wish them Merry Christmas. Tell them one of the things you most enjoy about Christmas is that it reminds you of just how much God loves each of us.
- Have a family conversation about what life in the kingdom of God is like. Think of ways we can help make our lives more like that.
- Pray for a world ruled by the Prince of Peace.
- And, if you have the opportunity, sample a foretaste of the sound of heaven by listening to a bit of *The Messiah*.

Prompts

1. Listen to “Comfort Ye, My People” from The Messiah. How does it make you feel? Where do you hear messages of hope and anticipation?
2. This sermon does not shy away from our role as evangelists – perhaps heirs to John the Baptist, in this regard! How comfortable are you with this role? What is one small step you can take this week to become more comfortable with it?

This study was written by Terry Parsons

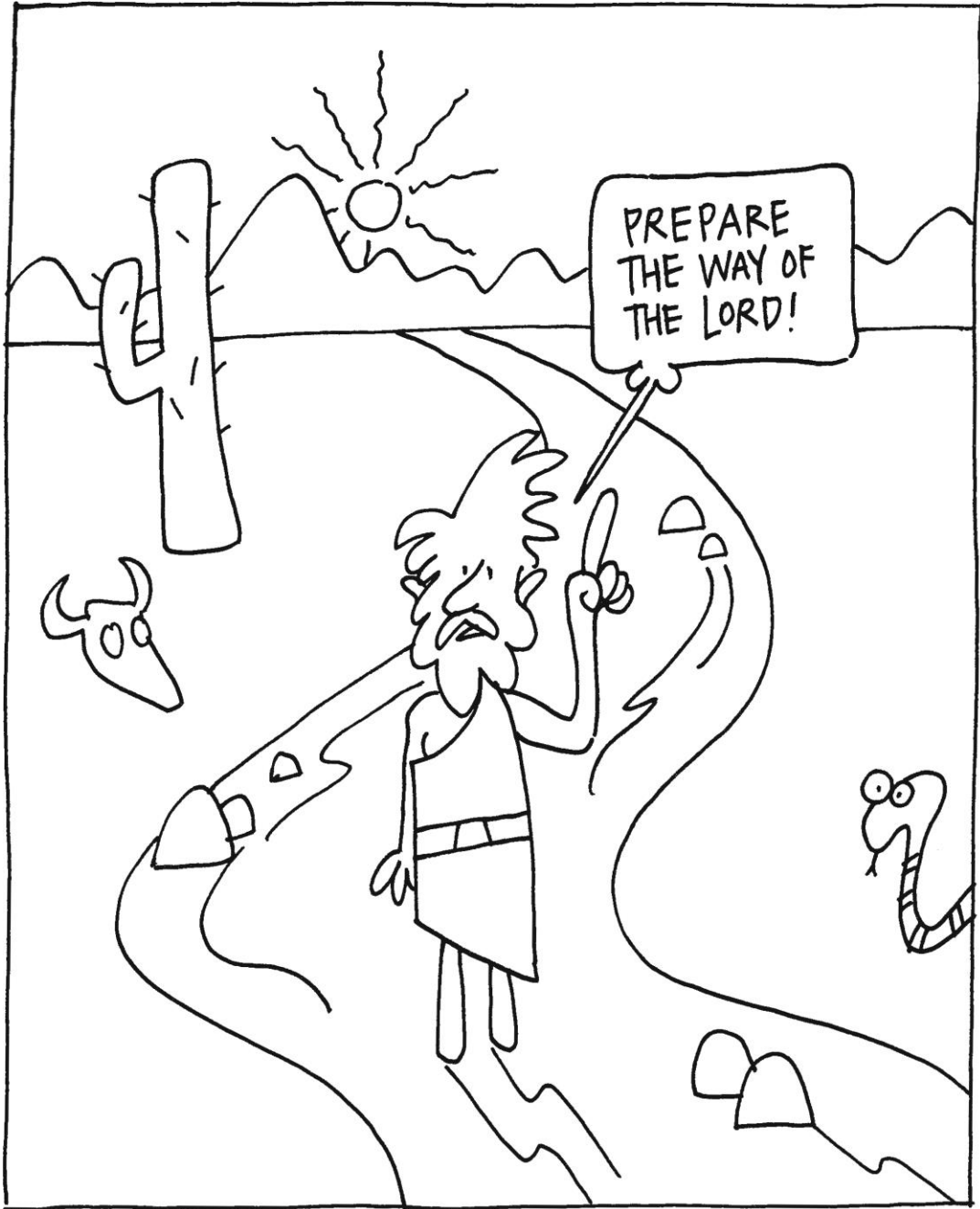
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Our Mission:

We seek to grow as diverse disciples of Jesus Christ, and to serve Jesus by serving others in the world, guided by the values of Ancient Rites, Open Minds, and Affirming Hearts.



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