

Third Sunday of Advent
Sunday, December 15, 2024

Introduction to the day

Christ's presence in our midst in the wonder of the holy supper is cause for singing. The nearness of the God in prayer, in every circumstance, is cause for rejoicing. The coming of one "more powerful" than John, even with a winnowing fork in hand, is good news—and cause for exultation—for us who are being saved. Great joy is the tone for the third Sunday of Advent.

Third Sunday of Advent

Use this blessing when lighting three candles.

Praise to you, O God, who holds our joy and sorrow.
You bring water to parched ground and life out of death.
Bless us as this light grows,
and send sorrow and sighing to flee away.
Give us strength and patience,
trusting that you are true to your promises.
Transform the lives of all who suffer
with your wonders near at hand. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the preaching of John, that, rejoicing in your salvation, we may bring forth the fruits of repentance; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING: Zephaniah 3:14-20

A reading from Zephaniah.

The prophet Zephaniah's message is mostly one of judgment for sin. This reading, however, which comes from the conclusion of the book, prophesies joy for Judah and Jerusalem. Judgment has led to repentance, and God's salvation is at hand.

PSALM: Isaiah 12:2-6

In your midst is the Holy One of Israel. (*Is. 12:6*)

SECOND READING: Philippians 4:4-7

A reading from Philippians.

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

GOSPEL: Luke 3:7-18

John the Baptist heralds the mighty one who is coming. John teaches that preparation for God's reign is not a matter of identity but of bearing fruits of merciful justice, radical generosity, and vocational integrity.

GOSPEL MESSAGE

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT - Together Rooted in Christ

The church's preachers and teachers often distinguish between John's baptism and our own baptism into Christ. But perhaps we have sometimes gone too far in supposing they are all that different. Both begin with repentance. Both orient us toward the good news that God forgives our sins and claims us as beloved children. Both call us to "grow in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God" (*ELW*, p. 227.)

The grace and love of God lavished on us in baptism are not the result of simple mechanics whereby we receive forgiveness because we've pressed the right buttons on the salvation machine. Instead, we live into God's forgiveness in deeply transformative and organic ways, like trees bearing good fruit. That John's baptism is, at its heart, about genuine transformation and living in a new way shaped by God's grace is apparent from the questions people ask him. Called to bear fruits worthy of repentance, they want to know: "What then should we do?" (Luke 3:10).

Advent offers us a wonderful chance to renew the gift of baptism by asking ourselves important questions about our direction in life and our relationships with others. How are you nurturing your prayer and worship life? What are you learning about your relationship with God? How are you growing in faith? How are you caring for others and the world God made? What help or support might you need on your spiritual journey that you're not currently receiving?

John turned people's hearts to God by reorienting them to their community. He encouraged them to share life together by uplifting one another, performing mutual acts of kindness, and nurturing a spirit of thanksgiving. In this season full of expectation, we look to Jesus' coming among us at the same time as we remember that we ourselves have been reborn children of God. In baptism, we have been welcomed into a community of care and support, together rooted in Christ, bearing good fruit, and proclaiming God's good news to all the world.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As we prepare for Emmanuel, God-with-us, let us pray for all people and places that long for God's presence.

God who reforms, fill your church with courage to do your will. Empower your people in taking risks that bear fruit. Raise up leaders who will proclaim the good news. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God who creates, you hold in balance diverse ecosystems. Encourage efforts to protect wild lands from devastation. Care for animals and people in the path of destructive fires, storms, and other disasters. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God who leads, this world cries out for true justice. Guide legislatures, judges, and lawyers in actions steeped in love and restoration. Increase the desire to advocate for all who are confronted with discrimination and oppression based on race, gender, sexuality, class, or age. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God who embraces, help us notice the places where your people are hurting or sick. We pray especially for Linda Boland, Ken Fulford, Sandra Gagnon, Shirley Glickman, Donna L. Hoffman, Claude Jeannotte, Cassie Jessup, Bill Lorbetskie, Glenda Panke, Barry Rogers, Marilyn Schneider, Danny Schultz, Doug Sell, Debbie Thom, Ron Thom, Keith Weckwerth, Denita Wolfgram, Elaine Yourth, Harold Yourth, Stephanie Yourth, and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. Show your compassion and remember your people in love. In this moment of silence we name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts those who need your healing touch. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God who abides, you dwell among the people of this congregation. Deepen our relationships with one another, and make us aware of the diverse talents and gifts present here. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God who consoles, we thank you for the time we have had with loved ones who have died. Comfort us with the promise of everlasting life in you. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

Savior of the nations, come, and receive these prayers and the pleas of our hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

BLESSING

Almighty God, Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. **Amen.**

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Remember the poor. **Thanks be to God.**

From sundaysandseasons.com.

Copyright © 2024 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.