

Second Sunday of Advent
Sunday, December 8, 2024

Introduction to the day

Forerunners and messengers advance the advent of our God. While John the baptizer's voice in the wilderness may be the principal focus of the day, Malachi's prophecy could as easily herald the coming Christ as forerunner of the LORD of hosts. Finally all the baptized are called to participate in the sharing of the gospel. In so doing we prepare the way for the coming of Jesus and assist all people in capturing a vision of the "salvation of God."

Second Sunday of Advent

Use this blessing when lighting two candles.

Praise to you, O God, who gives us courage to start again.

You fasten righteousness around your waist
and baptize with the Holy Spirit's fire.

Bless us as we mirror your mighty fire in these simple flames,
and teach us to mirror your justice in the paths we prepare.

We ask that peace abound,
until none hurt or destroy over all the earth. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming give to all the people of the world knowledge of your salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST LESSON: Malachi 3:1-4

A reading from Malachi.

God announces a covenant with Israel. A messenger like Malachi (his name means "my messenger") will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord by purifying and refining God's people, as silver and gold are refined.

PSALM: Luke 1:68-79

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us. (Lk. 1:78)

SECOND LESSON: Philippians 1:3-11

A reading from Philippians.

The apostle Paul was the pastor of many new churches. He writes in this letter about his joy to be in partnership with the Christians of Philippi. Listen to how tender-hearted Paul, sometimes a stern preacher, is with his friends as he encourages them to grow in love and knowledge.

GOSPEL: Luke 3:1-6

John the Baptist is a herald of Jesus, whose way is prepared by "repentance for the forgiveness of sins." As we hear the careful record of human leaders, we sense the spectrum of political and religious authority that will be challenged by this coming Lord.

GOSPEL MESSAGE - Road Maintenance

When John the baptizer arrives on the scene, it must mean Jesus is just around the next bend. Yet the path ahead that the prophet Isaiah describes has no bends or curves. It is a way made straight, one on which the rough spots have been smoothed out and the stumbling blocks removed. Our daily lives are rarely, if ever, made straight and smooth, though. The stressors we encounter at work, the difficulties of parenting or caring for family, the challenges that come as we get older fill our paths with twists and turns. Little is plain and simple, in life or in scripture. The point of the gospel is not that everything will be smooth for us if we just have faith. But neither are we hopelessly lost along the way. The good news is that God provides a way forward. Amid the obstacles are also openings.

Preparing our hearts to follow the way of Jesus involves work. Just as maintaining a roadway demands ongoing inspection and service, our spiritual lives and the lives of our faith communities require consistent, long-term attention, care, and commitment. During Advent, we in the church together recommit to the “roadwork” necessary for preparing the way. We open ourselves to receiving the gift of God’s creative presence in the world.

Faith is the opening through which God begins this work. We do not baptize ourselves. We are not called to do the work alone. Rather, we are baptized into a community of faith, as members of Christ’s body in the world. God’s grace given to us in word and sacrament transforms and empowers us to work collectively, to care for one another and God’s creation, to work for justice and peace. Life together won’t always be smooth or straightforward. There will be obstacles. But by the grace of God, there are also open roads ahead.

THE 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.

Refining God, move through your church. Root out practices that harm your people, and kindle a fire for sharing the gospel among bishops, pastors, deacons, and all the baptized. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

Renewing God, transform your creation. Steer us from habits that harm what you have made, and guide us in practices that preserve and restore creatures and habitats. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

Ruling God, teach the nations your ways. Strengthen organizations and communities that broker peace and care for refugees, immigrants, and all caught in the center of conflict. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

Rescuing God, restore your people who are in any need. Heal all who are suffering *especially* 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 Wolfram, Elaine Yourth, Harold Yourth, Stephanie Yourth, and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. Provide comfort and strength, and nurture sustained wholeness for the future. 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.**

Reforming God, fill this congregation with your presence. Enrich our seasonal preparations, and bless the efforts by worship committees, music ensembles, staff, clergy, and lay leaders as they work in the weeks ahead. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

Reassuring God, we remember those who have died and rest in you. Today we remember Father Ken O'Brien. Guide us in deep gratitude for their life, and allow us to learn from their faithful witness. 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. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

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