

## **Sunday, December 4, 2022 – Second Sunday in Advent**

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### **Introduction**

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.

### **Prayer of the Day**

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming nurture our growth as people of repentance and peace; 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: Isaiah 11:1-10**

*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.*

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

<sup>2</sup>The 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.

<sup>3</sup>His 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;

<sup>4</sup>but 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.

<sup>5</sup>Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

<sup>6</sup>The 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.

<sup>7</sup>The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup>The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

<sup>9</sup>They 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.

<sup>10</sup>On 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.

## **Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19**

<sup>1</sup>Give the king your jus- | tice, O God,  
and your righteousness to | the king's son;

<sup>2</sup>**that he may rule your | people righteously  
and the | poor with justice;**

<sup>3</sup>that the mountains may bring prosperity | to the people,  
and the | hills, in righteousness.

<sup>4</sup>**Let him defend the needy a- | mong the people,  
rescue the poor, and crush | the oppressor.**

<sup>5</sup>May he live as long as the sun and | moon endure,  
from one generation | to another.

<sup>6</sup>**Let him come down like rain upon | the mown field,  
like showers that wa- | ter the earth.**

<sup>7</sup>In his time may the | righteous flourish;  
and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall | be no more.

<sup>18</sup>**Blessed are you, LORD God, the | God of Israel;  
you alone do | wondrous deeds!**

<sup>19</sup>And blessed be your glorious | name forever,  
and may all the earth be filled with your glory. A- | men. Amen.

## Second Reading: Romans 15:4-13

*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.*

<sup>4</sup>Whatever 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. <sup>5</sup>May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup>Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. <sup>8</sup>For 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, <sup>9</sup>and 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”;

<sup>10</sup>and again he says,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;

<sup>11</sup>and again,

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

<sup>12</sup>and again Isaiah says,

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

<sup>13</sup>May 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.

## Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

*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.*

<sup>1</sup>In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, <sup>2</sup>“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” <sup>3</sup>This 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.’”

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

<sup>7</sup>But 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? <sup>8</sup>Bear fruit worthy of repentance. <sup>9</sup>Do 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. <sup>10</sup>Even 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.

<sup>11</sup>“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. <sup>12</sup>His 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.”

## Prayers of Intercession

As we prepare for the fullness of Christ's presence, let us pray for a world that yearns for new hope, saying "God in your mercy," and responding, "hear our prayer."

*A brief silence.*

God, you renew the church in every age. We give thanks for hymn writers and theologians (*especially John of Damascus, whom we commemorate today*). Inspire teachers, writers, and musicians to delight and instruct your people. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You give us a vision of creation in harmony, when hurting and destruction will be no more. Teach us to be stewards of the earth and companions to its creatures. Restore to balance and wholeness what human greed has harmed. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You defend the cause of all who are poor and oppressed. Raise up leaders who will govern with equity and serve the common good. Guide judges, lawmakers, and public officials to protect the rights of those who cannot advocate for themselves. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You deliver those in need from suffering and fear. Come to the aid of any who are exploited or abused, especially children, elders, and victims of human trafficking. Provide safety and help to our neighbors without shelter, refugees, and those fleeing violence. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You urge your people to welcome one another as you have welcomed us. Nurture ministries of hospitality and care in this and every congregation (*local examples may be named*). We pray for people who are homebound, hospitalized, or separated from loved ones (*especially*). God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You embrace all who have died trusting in your promises, and we give thanks for their faithful witness. Sustain us in hope until we are united with them in the joy of your eternal presence. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of our longing, you know our deepest needs. By your Spirit, gather our prayers and join them with the prayers of all your children. In Jesus' name we pray.

**Amen.**

## ***A reflection for this Second Sunday in Advent...***

### Pointing to Jesus

John the Baptist is a fitting messenger for the season of Advent, a time for the church to prepare for both the nativity of the Christ and for his second coming. John's call to repentance in preparation of Jesus' arrival carries a challenge for us to rid ourselves of everything that obstructs our view. His proclamation is filled with images of cleansing: straightening paths, cutting down useless trees, and burning away chaff. John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins means cleansing as well as a changing of the mind, a turning toward Jesus, so that one's whole self is pointed toward the Lord of this world and of eternity.

Undistracted even by thoughts of our own worthiness, the church's focus year round is turned toward the coming of Christ. John points to Jesus, never to himself, and in so doing becomes a model for discipleship. Having heard John's cry, we join the chorus, becoming messengers in turn. All our efforts in worship and evangelism, education and social ministry point, not to ourselves, our programs, our skill or our saintliness, but only to Jesus. Preparing the way of the Lord is very much about pointing others to his real presence in and among us.

This Sunday's Isaiah reading ("the grass withers, the flower fades") and that of 2 Peter ("all things are to be dissolved") reinforce the church's teaching that amidst all that is transient in our lives, and creation, only God's word is eternal. John the Baptist's testimony points us to that Word made flesh, who brings with him a new heaven and a new earth after all else has passed away. John directs us in our faith journeys as individuals and communities toward a witness that is forever pointing to Jesus.

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