

## **Introduction**

Isaiah and the psalmist make clear that God is turning our mourning into laughter and shouts of joy. “All God’s children got a robe,” go the words of a spiritual. It is not so much a stately, formal, pressed outfit as it is a set of party clothes, clothes we are happy to wear. We receive that robe in baptism, and in worship we gather for a foretaste of God’s party.

## **Prayer of the Day**

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; 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 61:1-4, 8-11**

*Though the people had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, they continued to face hardship and oppression. In the language of the jubilee year described in Leviticus 25, the prophet, moved by the spirit of God, announces deliverance for those who are oppressed and comfort for those who mourn.*

<sup>1</sup>The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;

<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;

<sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

<sup>4</sup>They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.

<sup>8</sup>For I the LORD love justice,  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;  
I will faithfully give them their recompense,  
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

<sup>9</sup>Their descendants shall be known among the nations,  
and their offspring among the peoples;

all who see them shall acknowledge  
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

<sup>10</sup>I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,  
my whole being shall exult in my God;  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

<sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth its shoots,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,  
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

### **Psalm: Luke 1:46b-55**

<sup>46b</sup>My soul proclaims the greatness | of the Lord,

<sup>47</sup>my spirit rejoices in | God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup>**for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your | lowly servant.**

**From this day all generations will | call me blessed:**

<sup>49</sup>you, the Almighty, have done great | things for me  
and holy | is your name.

<sup>50</sup>**You have mercy on | those who fear you,  
from generation to | generation.**

<sup>51</sup>You have shown strength | with your arm  
and scattered the proud in | their conceit,

<sup>52</sup>**casting down the mighty | from their thrones  
and lifting | up the lowly.**

<sup>53</sup>You have filled the hungry | with good things  
and sent the rich | away empty.

<sup>54</sup>**You have come to the aid of your | servant Israel,  
to remember the prom- | ise of mercy,**

<sup>55</sup>the promise made | to our forbears,  
to Abraham and his chil- | dren forever.

## **Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

*Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians by encouraging them to live lives of continual joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. The closing blessing is grounded in the hope of Christ's coming.*

<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup>Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Do not despise the words of prophets, <sup>21</sup>but test everything; hold fast to what is good; <sup>22</sup>abstain from every form of evil. <sup>23</sup>May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup>The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

## **Gospel Reading: John 1:6-8, 19-28**

*John's gospel describes Jesus as the "light of the world." John the Baptist is presented as a witness to Jesus, one who directs attention away from himself to Christ, the true light.*

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

<sup>19</sup>This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup>He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." <sup>21</sup>And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." <sup>22</sup>Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup>He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

<sup>24</sup>Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup>They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" <sup>26</sup>John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup>the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." <sup>28</sup>This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

## **Prayers of Intercession**

God of power and might, shine your radiance and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

*A brief silence.*

God of preachers and messengers, you have entrusted your church with the work of proclaiming good news. Strengthen the witness of bishops, pastors, deacons, church musicians, lay leaders, and all people who contribute their prayers and talents to our worship life. Embed your word in their hearts. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of every living creature, you announce the year of your favour for all of creation. Extend your kindness and relief to endangered animals and plants. Strengthen the human beings who rely on the rhythms of nature to make their living. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of all peoples and nations, you plant us as your oaks of righteousness and ask us to care for one another. Be present with the leaders of every nation as they govern. Give them a spirit of righteousness, that your goodness and mercy is revealed through their actions. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of exiles and wanderers, you repair what was once destroyed. We pray for people who have been displaced from their homes by fire, flood, earthquake, or storm. Support the work of Canadian Lutheran World Relief, and all disaster relief organizations in their recovery efforts. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of the powerful and helpless, you clothe us with strength when our spirits are weak and weary. Bestow your spirit upon this community and empower us to comfort the people who turn to us in times of need. Make your church a place of refuge and healing. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of sinners and saints, you offer joy even in the midst of our grief. We are grateful for the beloved, imperfect people whose lives testified to your radiant love. Anoint all who mourn with the oil of gladness. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## ***A reflection for the Third Sunday of Advent...***

### Give Witness and Rejoice

The third Sunday of Advent—also known as *Gaudete* (*rejoice*)—is one in which the church has rejoiced as the advent of the Messiah draws nearer. Whether or not you mark this Sunday with a pink candle on the wreath, the texts for the day echo this rejoicing, this “we’re almost there” excitement, in a multitude of ways. Isaiah couples images of a people restored with images of weddings and springtime and oak trees. The psalmist offers up images of a harvest festival, and Paul urges us to rejoice “always.”

John the Baptist, in his own way, calls for rejoicing by his acknowledgment that he is *not* what we are waiting for. John, like us, has a mission to bear witness, but when he says “I am not,” we hear a clear contrast to all the ways Jesus will identify himself with the Father: “I am the bread of life.” “I am the resurrection.” “I am the good shepherd.” All these things Jesus will be for God’s people, but John’s job is simply to bear witness to the light.

How do we bear witness, while still waiting? Or can joy in the midst of waiting be that very witness? In Advent we are not called to act as though we do not know how this story ends, as though Jesus’ birth and life, death and resurrection, are still before us. But we *do* know that sense of longing for God’s salvation to be fulfilled, and the temptation to imagine that we have to save ourselves, instead of waiting for God’s purposes to be worked out in God’s time. John reminds us that there can be joy in taking our proper place, pointing to Jesus without needing to *be* Jesus.