



## Mount Olive Advent Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Second Week of Advent (December 6 – 10, 2021)

### Monday

Luke 1:67, 76-79

<sup>67</sup> Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

<sup>76</sup> “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

<sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people

by the forgiveness of their sins.

<sup>78</sup> By the tender mercy of our God,

the dawn from on high will break upon us,

<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

We hear from John the Baptizer in Advent more than in any other season. John is the one who calls out to us, “Prepare the way of the Lord! Make his paths straight!” In this passage above, we hear John’s father responding to those who are asking, at John’s birth, “What then will this child become?” From all the miraculous happenings surrounding John’s birth they know that his life will be special, but they have no idea how this will be worked out. Here, Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, tells them: “He will be a prophet of God, preparing the Lord’s way, giving the knowledge of salvation to all people. He will announce God’s tender mercy to those who sit in despair and the shadow of death.” At first glance, this seems to be at odds with the John we know, the one who calls for repentance, announcing God’s judgment. Could it be that John did both? Undoubtedly this is the case. The word from John sounded like judgment to some people, while to others, that same word sounded like good news. To those who had used their power to tramp people down, his word called them to repentance. To those who had been so trampled, it was good news, for they knew that God had heard their cries, and had come as their deliverer. This is the way God’s word works. It both comforts and convicts, in whatever way we need it.

### Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for your Everlasting Word, the word that comforts and convicts. Give us ears to hear your word of comfort when we despair, and an openness to repentance when your word convicts us. In both we know we find life. In Jesus’ name. AMEN.

## **Tuesday**

Malachi 3:5-7

<sup>5</sup> Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>6</sup> For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. <sup>7</sup> Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

The prophet Malachi is another voice that comes to us in the season of Advent. Like John the Baptist, this one calls us to repentance. It is noteworthy that Malachi literally means “my messenger.” It is not thought to be a proper name, but simply the title of the one who speaks for God. In this case, the one speaking speaks primarily against a corrupt priesthood who has led the people astray. Notice what sins are lifted up: sorcery, adultery, lying, oppressing workers and those vulnerable, and failing to care for the foreigner. All of these sins, Malachi says, come from a fundamental failure to fear God. What Malachi seems to be saying is that a healthy reverence for God can keep us from falling into sin. When we realize that God is faithful, that just might lead us to be more faithful. When we realize God is compassionate to the vulnerable, we might become more compassionate. When we realize that God cares about the life of the foreigner amongst us, we might be more likely to do the same. Malachi’s lesson: Fear God, for in this posture there is life for us and for all those we encounter.

## **Prayer**

God of All Righteousness, grant us a healthy sense of awe in your presence. Keep us from presumption and disregard for your holiness. Remind us that you are a God who loves righteousness and hates wickedness, so that all our days we might be found faithful to you. We pray this in Christ’s name. AMEN.

## Wednesday

Philippians 1:12-18

<sup>12</sup> I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; <sup>14</sup> and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

<sup>15</sup> Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. <sup>16</sup> These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; <sup>17</sup> the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. <sup>18</sup> What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

The Apostle Paul is the ultimate maker of lemonade when handed lemons. In this letter, Paul is in prison, and not only is he not complaining about it, he is saying that his situation is actually furthering the ministry of the gospel. He goes on to say that to him it matters not why people proclaim Christ, just that they do it. What an example Paul is for us. I had a friend in college who told me about a book he was reading that explained that life can be seen as a series of miracles. Blue miracles were the events that happened in life that would likely be seen as positive developments. Red miracles were those events that would be seen by most as negative developments. In other words, no matter what happened, it was a miracle. Now, it's fair to say that this theology isn't without its problems, but be that as it may, there's no doubt that having such a mindset is commendable. What it results in is us looking for God to be at work (i.e. miracles) *in everything*, and that is a grand place to be. We could even call it a spirit of "holy anticipation." Now doesn't that sound like Advent.

## Prayer

Fill us with holy anticipation, O God. Give us faith to see you at work in all times and places, continually expecting your reign to break in. You are the God who delights in breaking into our world with a word of hope and love; help us to be those who hear this good word and live in it. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

## Thursday

### Psalm 126

<sup>1</sup> When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

<sup>2</sup> Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

<sup>3</sup> The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

<sup>4</sup> Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

<sup>5</sup> May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

<sup>6</sup> Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

A couple of winters ago my wife and I spent some time in Tucson with relatives. It was lovely to get away from the snow and cold for a few days and take in the warmth and sunshine of Arizona in January. Near the place we stayed was a watercourse, or what Arizonans call a "wash". It is a river bed that is dry most of the time, but it holds the water when the occasional downpour happens. In the Negeb desert of Israel there were watercourses too. When the psalmist asks God to restore their fortunes "like the watercourses in the Negeb," the picture is of a watercourse filled to overflowing following a rain. What has been bone dry for a long time is suddenly overflowing with water. This is what the psalmist pictures. In other words, what the psalmist is asking for is not just a few drips of blessing, but a torrent of abundance that will proclaim to the whole world the goodness of God. "Let us be," says the psalmist, "like those who go out weeping but [after experiencing God's abundance], return home "with shouts of joy" carrying the fruits of the harvest. We too can pray this prayer, trusting that even if our days seem to be in the midst of a drought, God is faithful, and a thunder shower of blessing is not far off.

## Prayer

We praise you, Faithful One, for the promise of your blessing. Our days are sometimes filled with sorrow; we need your comfort. Our days are often filled with anxiety; we need your peace. Our days are regular reminders of our mortality; we need your eternal spirit. Bless us, O God. Grant us your favor, that we might take joy in you in all our days. In your precious name, we pray. AMEN.

## Friday

Isaiah 40:1-5

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup>Every 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. <sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

I cannot read these words of Isaiah without hearing the music of Handel's Messiah in my head. I remember sitting mesmerized when I was a boy, when first hearing this marvelous piece of music. The tenor soloist is the first voice to sing, and his opening notes are pure comfort. In the words of King James English he sings forth, "Comfort ye," and the music is like a gentle spring rain running over your head. And why should we be comforted? Because the penalty for our sins has been paid, even double for all our sins. So he proclaims. And then, in joyous praise at this announcement, the whole chorus chimes in, singing, "Every valley shall be lifted up," and we, the listeners, are lifted up as well. There is great mystery in music and words that lift our spirits. How that works we really don't know. How can a certain combination of words and/or music cause us to laugh, to cry, to feel ecstasy or feel despair? We don't know. Martin Luther once said that, next to God's word, there is no greater gift to humankind than music. So I believe. Do yourself a favor: listen to Handel's Messiah this Advent season and experience the comfort and joy that God gives.

## Prayer

Lord Christ, you are the Savior of the world. You are the One who brings us comfort, for indeed, in you, all our sins are forgiven. Make us bearers of comfort to others, as well. Make us proclaimers of the good news that sins are forgiven, hope is alive, and Christ is coming again. We praise you forever. AMEN.