



Mount Olive Advent Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Fourth Week of Advent (December 20 – 24, 2021)

Monday

Isaiah 12:2-6

² Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. ³ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴ And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted.

⁵ Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth.

⁶ Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

I remember being in the Central African Republic once, at the dedication of a new hospital our congregation helped build. As part of the building project, a new well was dug near the campus where anyone could come and gather water for their needs. People did come, from the nearby village and all around, mostly young girls with buckets on their heads. They came and filled those buckets to overflowing, put them on their heads and walked back home, in some cases, for miles. The well that served those folks was a gushing fountain, a pipe coming out of the hillside that flowed day and night. It brought clean, cold, clear water to those thirsty souls day after day, as well as supplying the hospital with all its needs. Indeed it was a “well of salvation”. The Word of God is like that fountain for us. It gushes forth wisdom and grace day and night, never ceasing to provide all that thirsty souls need. We come day after day, filling our buckets to overflowing. Sometimes that well is in worship as we hear the Word preached. Sometimes it is in our daily devotions as God speaks to us here. Sometimes it comes to us through song, or a prayer, or a conversation with another child of God. Indeed it is the well of salvation.

Prayer

How we thank you, Gracious God, for giving us your Word which fills us day after day. We need your Word to strengthen, to rebuke, to heal, to convict, to correct, and to give us courage. Grant that each day we might receive what we need and be found faithful to you. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Luke 1:57-66

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰ But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." ⁶¹ They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." ⁶² Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

We don't often think of it, but Luke spends a lot of time in his gospel telling us about John the Baptizer. Indeed his birth, recorded here, and the persons and divine encounters associated with it take up the entire first chapter of Luke – 80 verses! Why all this attention to John? Jesus tells us: "Among those born of women no one is greater than John." (7:28) John prepared the way for Christ. He pointed to Jesus. But before we think that John was extraordinary in ways that are beyond us, listen to what Jesus goes on to say: "Among those born of women no one is greater than John; *yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*" Apparently God has designed *each of us* to point to Christ, each in our own way. Can you speak for Christ? Then speak. Can you serve others in the name of Christ? Then serve. Can you pray that others might find the peace and joy of Emmanuel – God with us – in this darkest time of the year? Then pray. Point to Christ. That's what we do.

Prayer

God of All, we give you thanks for John the Baptizer and others down through the ages who have preached the good news. We give thanks also for those who have served silently through humble acts of generosity and service. Help us to find our place as we seek each day to point to Christ, the Light of the World, in whose name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Acts 28:23-27

²³ After [the Jewish leaders in Rome] had set a day to meet with [Paul], they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. ²⁵ So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah, ²⁶ ‘Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. ²⁷ For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.’

You can hear Paul’s frustration and disappointment in his words here to the Jewish leaders in Rome. They are his people. They are his blood. He spent his entire growing up as a faithful member of the synagogue in Jerusalem. He longs for those he loves to love Jesus as he does. Some do. Some don’t. His life ends without him knowing whether the Way of Jesus would survive and flourish or die out. Perhaps you too know people you love who do not seem the least bit interested in Jesus. It is a hard thing, when for us, the Person of Christ is the Living Water from which we drink each day. We can do two things: We can continue to love these people in word and deed, and we can pray for them that Christ reveals himself to them. They are God’s children. God will not abandon them. We can trust that.

Prayer

We long for your Spirit to inspire those we love, O God. We long for them to drink from the Living Water which is Christ. Give to all our loved ones your protection and healing. And in your time, grant them also faith and peace. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Hebrews 10:11-18

¹¹ And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” ¹³ and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. ¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, ¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,” ¹⁷ he also adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” ¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

God with amnesia: there’s a concept. God says, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” I don’t know about you, but forgetting things is something that happens to me all the time. I forget a name. I forget that I promised I was going to do something. I forget where I put my keys. Sometimes I even forget where I put the list of things that I wrote down so that I wouldn’t forget! For us, forgetting is a pain. For God, however, forgetting must be a joy. When we say to God, “I hope you aren’t going to be too hard on me for all those sins I keep committing,” God says, “What sins? I don’t remember any sins.” And when we say, “I am so sorry that I keep coming to you confessing the same sins over and over,” again God says, “What sins?” God forgets. God remembers them no more. The Psalmist says that God throws our sins as far as the east is from the west. That’s pretty far. And St. John says that whenever we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and forgives *all* our sins [even the ones we forgot to confess]. How great it is to have such a forgetful God!

Prayer

We praise you, O God, for your amazing grace. Even though we remember our sins, you do not. Even though we commit the same sins again and again, they are new to you and you forgive them anew over and over. How gracious you are! Grant us faith and joy in believing. In your Son, Jesus’ name, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Psalm 112:1-9

- ¹ Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments.
- ² Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.
- ³ Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever.
- ⁴ They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.
- ⁵ It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice.
- ⁶ For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever.
- ⁷ They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD.
- ⁸ Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.
- ⁹ They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures forever; their horn is exalted in honor.

Christmas Eve when I was growing up was a special family time. We all got cleaned up and dressed in nice clothes for Christmas dinner. After dinner, we heard the Christmas story and sang some carols, and then *finally*, we got to open our presents around the Christmas tree. What fun it was! I still remember one Christmas that my dad opened his present from me – a hammer. He needed a hammer, and when he opened it up, it was clear that it was just what he wanted. How happy that made me. I almost never bought just the right gift for my dad, but that time I did. Getting special gifts is certainly a joy, but getting just the right gift for another is even more memorable. Perhaps that's why the psalmist reminds us that those who fear the Lord are also those who "have distributed freely, they have given to the poor, their righteousness endures forever; their horn is exalted in honor." Giving generously bring us joy; there is no doubt about that. And, as St. Paul says, "Not only does [our generosity] supply the needs of the saints, but overflows in many thanksgivings to God". Happy are they who fear the Lord, who greatly delight in God's commands, who give generously to those in need.

Prayer

Grant us generous hearts, O God. We have been given so much. Our lives are overflowing with your abundance. Accept our grateful praises. AMEN.