



Celebrate

Third Sunday of Advent
December 13, 2020

“Rejoice always,” begins the reading from 1 Thessalonians. 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.

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;
²to proclaim the year of the
LORD’s favor,
and the day of vengeance of
our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³to 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.
⁴They shall build up the ancient
ruins,
they shall raise up the former
devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many
generations.

⁸For 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.

⁹Their descendants shall be known
among the nations,
and their offspring among the
peoples;

continued

Psalm

Psalm 126; refrain, Ps. 126:3



When the LORD restored the for- | tunes of Zion,
then were we like | those who dream.

²Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
and our tongue with | shouts of joy.

Then they said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great | things for them.”

³The LORD has done great | things for us,
and we are | glad indeed.

⁴Restore our for- | tunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses | of the Negeb. **R**

⁵Those who | sowed with tears
will reap with | songs of joy.

⁶Those who go out weeping, carry- | ing the seed,
will come again with joy, shoulder- | ing their sheaves. **R**

or Luke 1:46b-55; refrain, Luke 1:52 [not printed]

First Reading, continued

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

¹⁰I 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.

¹¹For 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.

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.

Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing,
¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for
this is the will of God in Christ Jesus
for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit.
²⁰Do not despise the words of proph-
ets, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to
what is good; ²²abstain from every
form of evil.

²³May 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. ²⁴The one who
calls you is faithful, and he will do
this.

Gospel

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.

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

¹⁹This is the testimony given by
John when the Jews sent priests and
Levites from Jerusalem to ask him,
"Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and
did not deny it, but confessed, "I am
not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked
him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He
said, "I am not." "Are you the proph-
et?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they
said to him, "Who are you? Let us have

an answer for those who sent us. What
do you say about yourself?" ²³He said,

"I am the voice of one crying out
in the wilderness,

'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"
as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴Now they had been sent from the
Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why
then are you baptizing if you are nei-
ther the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the
prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I
baptize with water. Among you stands
one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one
who is coming after me; I am not wor-
thy to untie the thong of his sandal."

²⁸This took place in Bethany across
the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

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 public worship (*the congregation's worship leaders may be named*). 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 favor 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 (*survivors of recent natural disasters may be named*). Support the work of Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Disaster Response, 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 congregation 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.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

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 (*especially Lucy, martyr of the church*). 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.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday (commemoration of John of the Cross, renewer of the church, 1591) Psalm 125. **Tuesday** Acts 3:17-4:4. **Wednesday** Mark 9:9-13. **Thursday** Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26. **Friday** Hebrews 1:5-14. **Saturday** John 7:40-52. **Fourth Sunday of Advent** (commemoration of Katharina von Bora Luther, renewer of the church, 1552) 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38.

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