

**The Sunday Missive – December 5, 2021**  
**The Second Sunday in Advent**

**Hymn 72 Hark! the glad sound! the Savior comes**

Hark, the glad sound! the Savior comes, the Savior promised long;  
Let every heart prepare a throne, and every voice a song.

He comes, the prisoners to release in Satan's bondage held;  
The gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield.

He comes, the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure;  
And with the treasures of his grace to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace, thy welcome shall proclaim;  
And heaven's eternal arches ring with thy beloved Name.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KPpZkeJD6k>

**Lighting the Advent Wreath**

Holy One, we praise you for your child Jesus Christ, who is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, the wisdom that teaches and guides us, the Savior of every nation. Let your blessing come upon us as we light this wreath. May it be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.

Your kingdom is at hand, O God of justice and peace; you made John the Baptist its herald to announce the coming of your Christ, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Give us a spirit of repentance to make us worthy of the kingdom. Let complacency yield to conviction, that in our day justice will flourish and conflict give way to the peace you bestow in Christ. We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose day draws near: your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

**Hymn S280 *Gloria in excelsis***

***Glory to god in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.***

***Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,  
We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.***

***Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,  
You take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;***

***You are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.***

***For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,***

***You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,  
In the glory of God the Father, Amen.***

**Malachi 3:1-6**

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. 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. For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished.

## **The Song of Zechariah**

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel\* For he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David\* As he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.

That we would be saved from our enemies\* And from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors\* And has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham.

To grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies\* Might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High\* For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.

To give knowledge of salvation to his people\* By the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us\* To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

## **Philippians 1:1-11**

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the

one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

### **Hymn 75 There's a voice in the wilderness crying**

There's a voice in the wilderness crying, a call from the ways untrod:  
Prepare in the desert a highway, a highway for our God!  
The valleys shall be exalted, the lofty hills brought low;  
Make straight all the crooked places, where the Lord our God may go!

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up to the heights and sing!  
Proclaim to a desolate people the coming of their King.  
Like the flowers of the field they perish, like grass our works decay,  
The power and pomp of nations shall pass like a dream away;

But the word of our God endureth, the arm of the Lord is strong;  
He stands in the midst of nations, and he will right the wrong.  
He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, the lambs he'll gently hold;  
To pastures of peace he'll lead them, and bring them safe to his fold.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4ZHepVKZmM>

## **Luke 3:1-6**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

### **Look Again and Again -- Advent2C**

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who has looked favorably on the people and redeemed them. Who has raised up a mighty savior for us as promised through the mouth of holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, that we, being rescued from their hand, might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness all our days."

The Song of Zechariah, as this passage from Luke's gospel is known, lifts up the prophecy of the past to explain current events, as his father speaks to the infant John: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

Henri Nouwen was "...struck by the fact that the prophets speaking about the future of Israel always kept reminding their people of God's great works in the past. They could look forward with confidence because they could look backward with awe -- to Yahweh's great deeds." The same is true of nations, peoples and families. True progress is always connected to review and refreshment of the collective memory. We remember and build upon -- and if we are healthy, we examine carefully -- what has been in order to bring about

what might be. We must not regret the past, nor shut the door on it, but look upon it with rigorous honesty. The expectation of Advent is anchored in the event of God's incarnation. The more we get in touch with what happened in the past, the more we can be in touch with what is to come. By looking back in meditation, we can look forward in expectation. By reflection, we can project; by conserving the memory of Christ's birth, we can progress to the fulfillment of his kingdom. Wrote Nouwen: "I pray that Advent will offer me the opportunity to deepen my memory of God's great deeds in time, and will set me free to look forward with courage to the fulfillment of time by him who came and is still to come."

Our first reading, from the Book of Malachi is post-exilic prophesy. After 60 or so years in exile, the Israelites have finally been allowed to leave Babylon and settle where they like. Some decide to return to their homeland in Judah. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple is under construction. Things are looking up when this book is composed – the Persians are in charge, but they are not insufferably oppressive as the Babylonians have been, nor as the Romans will be. It's not somebody's name, Malachi. It means 'The Messenger.' The book is by an anonymous author, about whom nothing is said. Perhaps it is a collaboration, whose twin purposes are to reiterate the joyful assurance that justice will indeed ultimately prevail on Earth with the coming of the Lord: "And He will purify." Its purpose is to remind us that preparation for the coming of God includes a call to repentance and purification ourselves, as we are able.

Fast-forward five and a half centuries or so, and we see Zechariah's son John seemingly fulfilling the prophecies of old; He is the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make God's paths straight." John's life and ministry are about God, specifically about Jesus, the one who will come after him. For John, the baptismal sacrament is a ritual cleansing that everyone needs in order to reconcile themselves with the Good; with God: "He washed my sins away..." In John's time, a strict sect of the Hebrew people, the Essenes were active. One of their ritual practices was to bathe -- quite a bit. They lived in Qumran, where some of the oldest biblical texts have been found, known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, and where scholars think John went for his spiritual formation after being orphaned. His

parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, were already quite old when John was born. The Essene rituals called for repeated cleansing baths to maintain purity; there were fourteen cisterns – one for every dozen residents -- and a water catchment system in the Qumran complex. And they kept themselves apart from the rest of society. But John, became convinced that in such isolation, he could not serve God's purposes. The Word of the Lord as he heard it called him to preach to the people of Judea and baptize them, cleansing their bodies from sin, even as they cleansed their souls by acknowledging and asking forgiveness for their sins.

This was not just repenting as in 'change your ways,' it was 'think again' repenting. Think again about what's right, who is entitled to true authority, what constitutes wealth, what is the basis for hope. It was that kind of deep self-examination that repentance demanded. John the Baptist broke into the society of his day, challenging the political, military, commercial and religious establishments, and demanding that the people see all these establishments differently, because they weren't in tune with the sacred precepts of God: mercy, justice, humility, charity, submission, gratitude, awe. John the Baptist represented a passionate alternative view of society, antithetical to the status quo and thus dangerous to and demonized by the 'powers that be,' of his day, both Roman and Hebrew.

Governments are still unjust; the strong and established punish, incarcerate, exile and kill the poor, the weak, the desperately troubled and the foreign. Military might is still all too often used to control whomever a nation would exploit for commerce, instead of for safety and freedom from tyranny. Today, commercial systems still force the very many to enrich the very few. And many religious establishments all over the world humiliate, overburden, infuriate, alienate and jeopardize people just like they did in John's day. Although much good is done in the name of faith, surely all too much is left undone.

Repentance is not just ruefully admitting that we have done the things we ought not to have done. Repentance is thinking again and again and again about those things, and what they say about who we are. It is a matter of critically and creatively examining what we do in order to determine what are the things we ought to have done but haven't.

Conventional Wisdom is one of the great oxymorons. Yes, we have to pick our battles. And yes, the wise submit to existing conditions when they are helpless to change them, but evils that are addressable and avoidable must be rooted out without sparing a grain of effort nor a single moment. If there are persistent evils in ourselves or in our society that we are capable of addressing but do not – endless gun violence protected by so-called ‘freedoms’ is one obvious example – we cannot say that our preparations for the coming of the Lord are fine. We are not making the crooked straight, nor the rough places plain. As the great Yogi Berra would have it, we can expect to be included out.

Many of us have a vision of the kind of person God wants us to be. Like John, we must be true to that vision, whatever it is, and we must try to live into it. In all people, there is goodness that is of God: a life we could live, a life God wants for us. We are afforded a daily reprieve from our failings, based on our desire to address them, to perceive and pursue who God wants us to become.

Wrote Thomas Merton: “All Christians are enabled and obliged to renounce sin and give themselves completely, without compromise to Christ, in order that they may fulfill their baptismal promises, enter into the mystery of God and there find themselves perfectly ‘in the light if Christ.’ As St. Paul reminds us ‘we are not our own.’ We belong entirely to Christ; whose Spirit has taken possession of us at baptism. We are the Temples of the Holy Spirit. Our thoughts, our actions, our desires are more rightly God’s than our own. But we have to struggle to ensure that God always receives from us what we owe by right.

“O Lord, awaken us from the comfortable existence in which we may too often be safely cocooned, and challenge us to accept the call of our baptism. Afflict us with your grace, so that we may take seriously our efforts to aid the poor, to comfort the sad and lonely, to change ourselves and our society for the better, and to let our light shine as a beacon to all who can use our help.” ***Amen***

## **The Prayers of the People**

I ask your prayers for God's people throughout the world; for this gathering; and for all ministers and people. Pray for the Church.

*Silence*

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people. Pray for justice and peace. *Silence*

I ask your prayers for all those in need of healing and strength, especially\_\_\_\_\_. Pray for the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, and those in prison and all those in any need or trouble.

*Silence*

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or deeper self-knowledge and faith . Pray that they may find and be found by Christ. *Silence*

I ask your prayers for the departed, especially those we name now, silently or aloud\_\_\_\_\_. Pray for those who have died. *Silence*

I ask your prayers of thanksgiving for the blessings of this life, especially those we name now, silently or aloud\_\_\_\_\_ *Silence*

Praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honoured. Pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day by ordering our lives according to his Word. Amen.

### **Collect of the Day**

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **The Confession**

Almighty and most merciful God, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws. We

have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, spare thou those who confess their faults, restore thou those who are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto humankind in Christ Jesus our Lord; and grant, O most merciful God, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen. Now may the One who loved the world enough to send the first and only child to live among us in great humility, open your eyes to look for the day when that child comes again. And thus, the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you today and remain with you always. *Amen.*

### **Hymn 59 Hark a thrilling voice is sounding Vv 1-4**

Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding. "Christ is nigh," it seems to say"  
Cast away the works of darkness, O ye children of the day."

Wakened by the solemn warning, from earth's bondage let us rise;  
Christ, our sun, all sloth dispelling, shines upon the morning skies.

Lo! the Lamb, so long expected comes with pardon down from heaven;  
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow, one and all to be forgiven.

So when next he comes with glory, and the world is wrapped in fear,  
May he with his mercy shield us, and with words of love draw near.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCrEt11-SFU>

### **Praying**

It doesn't have to be the blue iris, it could be weeds in a vacant lot, or a few small stones; just pay attention, then patch a few words together and don't try to make them elaborate, this isn't a contest but the doorway into thanks, and a silence in which another voice may speak.

Mary Oliver