



Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
www.trinitylutheran.ca

December 8, 2024
Second Sunday in Advent

Announcements

Juice boxes are still needed at Street Help Shelter. The Welcome Centre Shelter for Women needs granola bars, fruit rollup-type items and another snack item for snack packs for children at the centre. Please leave donated items on the table in the Narthex.

Coming Up

December 21 - Trinity's NEW tradition Christmas musical event will be the first offering in our new "Trinity Musical Arts Series." The premiere event begins at 2 p.m. and will feature a performance of the Academy Brass Quintet. This concert marks the beginning of our new ministry that builds upon Trinity's great musical tradition and aims to establish affordable music outreach to the community. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$10 for students. Tickets are available in the church office and at the door.

We Remember in our Prayers

In Residence: Cordelle

Members: Bunny, Donna, Ed, Joan, Susan, Connie, Lorraine, Brenda

Friends & Family: Anna, Asdis, Audrey, Dot, Jean, Mary, Randy, Roger, Rose, Frank, Tanya, Nash, Jeff

Introduction to the day

Forerunners and messengers advance the advent of our God. While John the baptizer's voice in the wilderness may be the principal focus of the day, Malachi's prophecy could as easily herald the coming Christ as forerunner of the Lord of hosts. Finally, all the baptized are called to participate in the sharing of the gospel. In so doing we prepare the way for the coming of Jesus and assist all people in capturing a vision of the "salvation of God."

Hymns

ACS #905 We are waiting for Jesus

ELW #264 Prepare the royal highway

ELW #256 Comfort, comfort now my people

ELW #241 O Lord, how shall I meet you

Prayer of the day

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming give to all the people of the world knowledge of your salvation; 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: Malachi 3: 1-4

¹ 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. ² 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; ³ 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. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to

the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

Psalm Luke 1: 68-79

⁶⁸ Blessed are you, Lord, the ^l God of Israel,
you have come to your people
and ^l set them free.

⁶⁹ **You have raised up for us
a ^l mighty Saviour,
born of the house of
your ^l servant David.**

⁷⁰ Through your holy prophets, you promised of old to save us ^l from our enemies,

⁷¹ from the hands of ^l all who hate us,

⁷² **to show mercy ^l to our forebears,
and to remember your ^l holy
covenant.**

⁷³ This was the oath you swore to our ^l father Abraham:

⁷⁴ to set us free from the hands of our ^l enemies,

**free to worship you ^l without fear,
⁷⁵ holy and righteous before you,
all the days ^l of our life.**

⁷⁶ And you, child, shall be called the prophet of ^l the Most High,

for you will go before the Lord to pre- ^l pare the way,

⁷⁷ **to give God's people
knowledge ^l of salvation
by the forgiveness ^l of their sins.**

⁷⁸ In the tender compassion ^l of our God

the dawn from on high shall ^l break upon us,

⁷⁹ **to shine on those who dwell in**

**darkness and in the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.**

Second reading: Philippians 1: 3-11

³ I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴ constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵ because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Gospel: Luke 3: 1-6

¹ 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, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ 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.

⁵ 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;

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Sermon

Taking our bearings

May God's grace be known to your hearts and lives this morning and each day...

I watched a sportswriter argue with her editor one Friday afternoon some years back.

The editor had assigned her to cover a sport that was being introduced to the city at an event the next day. The writer ... who was a former competitive swimmer ... wanted to cover a swim meet instead of an orienteering press conference and participate in a brief orienteering exercise.

By Saturday night, she had become a rabid fan of the sport.

In orienteering, competitors are given a compass and a special topological map. They try to cover a designated route in a specified amount of time or in the fastest time. Within a month, the sportswriter was competing with others over courses in the woods and over the rocks of Northern Ontario.

There is also a version of the sport that takes place at night.

In that version, competitors are given a small light, compass and a map and are expected to navigate a course ... locating a flag before going on to the next flag. Another version includes taking bearings by the stars in order to make your way to the final destination.

Imagine, though, standing on unfamiliar ground ... in the dark ... not knowing what's just out of range of your sight.

Luke's account this morning begins with a listing of the political and religious leaders of the time. They are the men who sit at the centre of power in the region.

Meanwhile, we find John out in the wilderness around the Jordan River. There, he lives a life of vulnerability ... to the elements, to the land and to the powers of the world.

But the wilderness is also the place that prepares John ... making him receptive ... to hear the word of God. God's word in Luke comes to people far away from the places of the world's power.

It is John who bears witness to who is to come and what it means for the people.

John has heard God's word in the wilderness and has begun proclaiming a baptism of repentance ... proclaiming the reality that confession and forgiveness cleanses one's heart.

To John, baptism wasn't for the pardoning of sins, but for a cleansing of the body and the soul that was realized in righteous acts in the world. It's about setting hearts right.

To Luke, repentance is about finding a new perspective ... about adopting that new perspective and living into it. It's about seeing the truth about yourself ... seeing the truth of the world ... and seeing the truth about God's presence.

To see God in the moment.

John is not calling for people to repent for the sake of repentance, but rather to repent as a means to redirect their hearts toward God. By doing so, people would reorient themselves toward something that offers life and reconciliation ... rather than to the death and division offered by the world.

We should take notice of John's location when he was the most receptive to receiving God's word ... and where the people who responded to John's words found themselves.

As Yale professor Willie James Jennings puts it:

"The word of God often comes to us in such places and times of vulnerable reception, when we are ready to hear what God will say, even if we do not think we are ready."

The wilderness prepared John for the ministry of transformation and social change ... its challenges of scarcity and isolation made people's hearts more receptive to John's message of hope and of God's love ... and more attuned to what that message carried for the world.

It is a message that needs to be shared as we move through the wilderness of the Advent season.

This is the time when we journey through the darkness toward the manger in Bethlehem ... it is a journey oriented by the light of a single star. It is a time when we can find ourselves receptive to the call to minister to the world around us ... the call to simply love one another and hold close to those who walk in a darkened wilderness each day ... living a life of disoriented scarcity and hostility.

John cries out to the people to prepare the way of the Lord ... to level the ground ... to remove valley and mountain ... to straighten and smooth the paths that lead a person to God.

We should ask ourselves how well we are prepared ... are we prepared? How well are we oriented for the journey and have we made the path easier for others to travel?

John calls out for people to ease the challenges faced by those who are scrambling through their darkness.

In the darkness of Advent ... in the wilderness places of life ... that is where the Holy happens ... that is where God is made known. Through our ministry to others ... through our inclusive work ...

our embrace of the stranger ... the foreigner ... that is how love ... grace ... is experienced.

But it's not just about making the journey easier for others ... easing the burdens they bear ... it is also about orienting a person's heart and making it easier for them to see and know God.

If the valleys are filled ... the mountains laid low ... and the paths straightened ... then the sight-lines become clear and straight ... people can witness and experience God's love ... the promise of grace in action.

The ground has been prepared for people to witness and offer authentic testimony to that unconditional love. During Advent we can bear such witness through our words and acts.

Last week, Street Help ... the shelter we support through food donations ... put out a call to the community to help children of families who rely on the shelter and its kitchen. These children and their families live in a wilderness of scarcity, hunger and isolation.

Street Help produced a list of children, their sex and their ages with the request for people to provide a gift to the children. I asked the shelter for a list of about 10 children so Trinity can help in the effort. Judging by the feedback that we received from others in the community, the idea that a church would help out is surprising to some.

... talk about your valleys and mountains.

I have a list of nine children of various ages who are facing a less-than-joyous Christmas. The list is on the table in the Narthex, I encourage you to select a child, purchase a present for them, wrap it and tag it, and bring it back to the church next Sunday.

When we perform such ministry we straighten others' paths ... we remove obstacles ... bringing joy and hope to others ... we make a God who so loves the world visible and give form and substance to the grace we have received.

We offer our testimony of God in the world.

And ... in that moment ... salvation comes as God acts through us and someone's world changes ... it reorients to a different view ... a view where abundant love overwhelms the scarcity of this life. The world changes, as God is made visible.

In that moment ... light peels back the darkness ... new life enters the world ... and a new creation is made known as the world reorients itself to God's economy of love.

So, as we leave this place ... as we reach out to those in the wilderness ... let us take our bearings from the evening star.

AMEN

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever and ever.

AMEN

Blessing

The Ancient One, enthroned,
the Crucified One, now risen,
the Indwelling One, poured out,
✠ bless you now and forever.

AMEN

EVEN MORE ANNOUNCEMENTS...

We are in the process of reviewing and updating our membership records. If you would like a visit from Pastor Chris, please call the church office and leave a message. Pastor Chris would be happy to visit and bring you communion, if you have difficulty attending church services.