

## Advent #3

12/13/2020

J.V. Trautwein

Vicar Karen Pugatch

### Celebrate (Introduction)

“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 as 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.”

We come together in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Hymn: [“Fling Wide the Door”](#)

### Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,<sup>[a]</sup>  
we were like those who dream.

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

<sup>3</sup> The Lord has done great things for us;  
we are glad.

<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> He that goes forth weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
bringing his sheaves with him.

Hymn of Praise: [“Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart”](#)

### 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.”

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading:** [Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11](#)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading:** [1 Thessalonians 5:16-24](#)

**The Gospel:** [John 1:6-8, 19-28](#)

**Hymn of the Day:** [“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”](#)

**The Angel Tree , Advent Wreath, and The Message** ([Video Link](#))

John 1:6-8, 19-28

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

19 This is the testimony given by John when the Temple authorities sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” 20 He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” 21 And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” 22 Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 23 He said,

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,  
‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ”

as the prophet Isaiah said.

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” 26 John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, 27 the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” 28 This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Please pray with me.

Holy One, giver of life and light, as your word is read and proclaimed, illumine our hearts and minds, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, our lives may reflect God’s glory. Amen

You can’t get to Jesus without going through John and you can’t get to John without entering the wilderness. This is a harsh uninhabited place where life is subsistence level at best, a place

where many “respectable people” dare not go for fear of what might be lurking there. The wilderness is where we have seen the people in flight from captivity in Egypt, the place where the persecuted await safety and rescue from their attackers or oppressors, it is where Hagar meets and names God. The wilderness is where Jesus is tested.

The wilderness is in stark contrast with the well-ordered world of the temple. People came to the city of Jerusalem, to the temple to offer sacrifice to be cleansed. Yet in the story of John, people are leaving the city, this seat of power, and flocking to the wilderness to repent and be washed by this crazy man. Away from the pretense of the temple culture. Away from this grand building, rebuilt by Herod in an attempt to garner favor with Israel and with Rome. Away from the highly monetized and ritualized business of religion, where priests held sway over every aspect of life and rubbed shoulders with those wielding political power. Out into the wilderness where danger is not clothed in opulent robes and where there is no veil or curtain to hide behind- a place of our own vulnerability yet where God seems most accessible, indeed where it seems God beckons us to go.

Like so much of the narrative of Jesus’ life, this story turns convention on its ear-shattering the status quo and centering liminal places and marginalized people. Remember, this wilderness where John was giving his testimony is many miles away from the city-a long and dangerous trek. Those with the “power”, those comfortably ensconced in Jerusalem do not know what to do with this man called John. This strange figure who has appeared in the wilderness looking like the prophet Elijah in his camel hair garment. The priests are worried, perhaps because of the words of the prophet Malachi who chastised the priests of his time and who prophesied the return of Elijah. They are fearful because crowds flock to this man; those in power feel threatened by John who has been sent by God as a witness to give testimony about the light, about the one already among us-the one who is promised to come.

Who are you? They demand. “I am not the Messiah. Not Elijah. Not the prophet. Who are you? I am the voice crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord.” Or, did he say, “I am the voice crying out, in the wilderness make straight the way of the Lord.” Truth be told ancient Hebrew did not use punctuation so either way could be right! Depending on where you put the comma changes this statement-is the voice in the wilderness or is the wilderness where we must prepare to meet the Lord? Maybe this is a both/and situation. The second option certainly fits with the ministry of Jesus in many ways and I know from my own life experience it is in the wilderness times that I have had the most meaningful encounters with God.

In the vastness of the wilderness there is space, space to wonder and to examine ourselves and our own lives. With the trappings of civilization stripped away, out under the starlit sky we are forced to become our essential selves. Even now, maybe especially now, we too long for the stark wilderness where we can go to repent and be cleansed, to long for the things in our lives that mask our true selves to be rendered useless. To answer the question: Who are you? Who are you really? Because when the things we are not are stripped away, the who we really are comes into focus and in some way this stripped down, essential version of ourselves shapes who Jesus becomes in our own lives, because only then do we truly see our need for a savior-

for Emmanuel -God with us. We need to be able to say I am not the savior-my own or yours I cannot make things OK because I am in the wilderness too.

In this country, in this crazy, covid-fever-dream season of Advent as we wait and watch for Messiah It feels to me that our nation is in a different kind of wilderness. The stress and strain of politics and pandemic has stripped our nation bare and forced us out into the open- into taking a closer look at who we really are. It seems to me that we too have turned to defining ourselves or maybe others by who they are not-you are not like me...I am(thankfully) not like you. Don't you feel it too? Those differences have become uncrossable chasms as we are driven into tribal camps-ready to make war on one another. Even those of us who self-identify as Christians fall on either side of that great man-made divide.

But it is Advent and this week we hear again from John-who came as a witness to testify to the light. John brings the news of the divine word-the light and places it squarely in our own experience. The incarnation has changed and will continue to change our relationship with God and with one another. We need to listen to John's testimony and prepare a way in our wilderness for the one who will come, who is already among us! Just as the people left the city to encounter John in the wilderness we too are looking for something real, someplace where we can become our best selves-who God intends for us to be. We need to do that difficult work of self-examination and get to the core of our own beliefs, faith, and motivations and step away from those thoughts and actions that cloud our own ability to engage in and give witness and testimony to God's actions in our lives and this world.

If there is one thing needed in this time and this place-it is disciples of Jesus. As followers of Jesus, we really do know the way through the wilderness. It isn't an easy path-mountains must be made low and valleys lifted up so the glory of the Lord can be revealed in and through our words and deeds as followers of the way, as disciples of Jesus. Let your light so shine before others so they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Words we say as we share the light of God's love with the newly baptized.

Advent is the time for us to prepare, to set aside those things that divide us and to jettison those negative self-identifiers the world demands us to acquire so that we can be truly open to the good news of the incarnation. That into this wilderness life, God shines the light of salvation. Amen

**The Anthem:** ["The Magnificat"](#)

**Offering\*** ([On-Line Giving Link](#))

We give thee but thine own, what e'er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from thee.

## **The Prayer**

Loving Father, amidst this season of preparing for the joy of Christmas, we are struck by the surge of the pandemic bringing much suffering and far too many deaths. We pray for those who are adversely affected both physically and economically. Grant us the wisdom and love to creatively reach out and touch their lives with comfort and assistance. While we realize that the spread of this virus will continue, we are thankful that after many months of research a vaccine is now becoming available. This is a true gift of joy. Continue to give us the will and love to follow safe practices over the next several month while the vaccine is being distributed and administered'

We continually pray for all those who are giving of themselves by comforting and bringing life-saving procedures to the sick and dying. Let each of us understand the sacrifice they are making and be thankful for their service. Grant to us patience and the will to follow guidelines in order to slow the spread of this deadly disease.

We pray for all whole need your comforting and healing presence especially Bob and Pat Allen, Heidi Brackbill, Parker Brennan, the Elshafei family, Betty Fultz, Katie Hawkins, the Johnson Family, Robert Karner, Donna Mayhew, Bev and Jim Mertz, Wendy Neumann, Elise Oliver, Peter Olsen, David Otto, Dottie Reitz, Robert Reitz, Linda Rigby, Colin Shea, Jerry Shea, Jack Smith, the Spiegler family, Linda Stephens, Yongyin Sun, Esther and Buck Trautwein, Linda Williamson, Pastor Jack, and all those who are suffering pain, and sorrow as a result of this pandemic.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **The Benediction**

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine upon you;

The Lord lift up His presence upon you and give you peace. Amen

And now my brothers and sisters

Live on knowing God's love,

The joy of living this life of love,

And the peace which only come through the power of His presence within you.

So live on in Love, Joy, Peace, and Power.

### **Closing Hymn: ["The King Shall Come"](#)**

We are discontinuing in person worship services on Sundays until further notice. The online worship experiences will continue as well as the Midweek Thoughts.

Bible Study with Vicar Karen Pugatch, Tuesdays, 12:30-1:30PM more information attached below.

\*Offering to be sent to:

Bob Brackbill  
10274 Raleigh Tavern Road  
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Epiphany Lutheran Church  
9122 Sybert Drive  
Columbia Hills  
Ellicott City, MD 21043

<https://www.epiphanylutherancolumbia.org>

Please note that you now have the opportunity of online giving with the link found after the offering designation or here: [https://tithe.ly/give\\_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/2627291](https://tithe.ly/give_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/2627291)

Zoom Bible Study

Meeting ID: 941 432 0826

Password: 300maple

OR

By Telephone: (929) 205-6099

Meeting ID: 941 432 0826

Password: 914022