

## **December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011 Third Sunday of Advent**

### **Introduction to the Day**

*"Rejoice always," begins the reading from First 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 the spiritual. It is not so much a stately, formal, pressed outfit as it is a set of party clothes, clothes that make us feel happy just to put on. We receive that robe in baptism, and in worship we gather for a foretaste of God's party.*

*After a moment of silent meditation to prepare ourselves for worship, we will begin the liturgy.*

### **Prayers of the People**

Walking in the light of the coming Savior, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who await God's justice.

*A brief silence.*

God of love, you have clothed all the baptized in garments of salvation; equip us to bear witness to the Light of the world, that all might believe. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of goodness, all creation proclaims your glory; open our eyes to see your power and majesty in the detailed beauty of our world, and open our hearts to be gentle caretakers of the earth. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of justice, you anointed prophets to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners; by your Spirit raise up prophetic voices today to challenge all that enslaves people and condemns many to lives of poverty. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of peace, you promise to turn mourning into dancing. Comfort all who mourn, bring healing to the sick, and give hope and reconciliation to those estranged from family. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of joy and gladness, you desire that we give thanks in all circumstances. In this season of preparation for the coming of your Son, open us to experience your grace in

unexpected places. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

God of faithfulness, you have covered your saints with the robe of righteousness; we give you thanks for those who have died, and we entrust them to your keeping. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your steadfast love and faithfulness, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Lector: Please read the introduction, then the citation (i.e.. “The First Reading is from the.... chapter of ...” - then read the text. )**

**First Reading** – *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 the Lord, announces deliverance for those who are oppressed and comfort for those who mourn.*

**Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11**

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;  
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
to 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.  
They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;

they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.  
For 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.  
Their descendants shall be known among the nations,  
and their offspring among the peoples;  
all who see them shall acknowledge  
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.  
I 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.  
For 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.

The Word of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm**                      Psalm 126  
When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,  
then were we like those who dream.  
**Then 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."**  
The LORD has done great things for us,  
and we are glad indeed.  
**Restore our fortunes, O LORD,  
like the watercourses of the Negeb.**  
Those who sowed with tears  
will reap with songs of joy.  
**Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed,  
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.**

**SECOND READING** - *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.*

## **1 Thessalonians 5:16–24**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May 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. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

\* **Gospel Reading** – *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.*

## **John 1:6–8, 19–28**

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 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.

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

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**