

The Third Sunday of Advent

A Reading from the Book of Isaiah [35:1–10]

Someday, the desert will be so happy that it will break out in flowers! There will be yellow and purple and white crocuses all over and they'll be singing! The wilderness will look like the most beautiful part of Lebanon. Someday, we'll be so excited because we will see God in all God's glory. And those whose hands don't work will be strengthened, and if your knees creak and ache, they'll be like they're brand new. If you're scared, let me say to you, "Be strong. Don't be afraid. God has everything under control. God will come and save you." And then, blind people will be able to see and deaf people will hear. People who had trouble walking will jump around just like deer, and if you couldn't talk before, you won't be able to stop singing for joy. Water will rush through the wilderness and streams up from the desert. Instead of burning sand, there will be a swimming pool. The desert sands won't be thirsty anymore.

And there will be a highway running right through the desert, in the middle of nowhere, and we'll call it God's Highway. It will be for the people of God to walk. And no one who walks on it will get lost. You won't have to worry about dangerous animals coming after you when you're on God's Highway. Everyone who has walked away from God can come back singing. And nothing will make them sad anymore.

The Word of the Lord.

Canticle 15

My soul is so happy. I can't stop singing about God's kindness
to me, a lowly servant.

From now on, everyone will know that I have been blessed.

God has done great things for me and God's name is holy.

God's heart goes out to those who walk the right way, in every generation, young and old.

God is strong enough to scatter proud people in every direction. God picks up those who think they're better than anyone else, and flings them off their fancy chairs, but he picks up those who are sad and lifts up their chins so they can hold their heads high again.

God has done great things for me and God's name is holy.

God feeds hungry people the best food they've ever eaten.

And when people with too much get in line, God says, "Enough already."

God remembers his promise of mercy and has come to help out the people in Israel.

God promised mercy to our ancestors, to all of Father Abraham's children forever.

God has done great things for me and God's name is holy.

A Reading from the Letter of James [5:7–10]

I know it's hard to wait, my friends, until the Lord comes again. Just like the farmer has to wait for his seeds to grow. He can't hurry them up. He has to be patient too, and wait for the rain. So be patient like the farmer. Make your hearts strong, for the Lord is coming again. Soon. Friends, please don't grumble about each other or to each other. When people hear you grumble, it's hard for them to believe that you follow Jesus. Believe me, I know it's tough to wait. The prophets before us who spoke in the Lord's name when no one would listen to them, they got discouraged in their waiting too. Look to them and their example when you get tired of waiting.

The Word of the Lord.



*The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ According
to Matthew [11:2–11]*

John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, was in prison. Somehow he heard about what Jesus was doing, so he sent Jesus a message with some of his friends. "Tell me, Jesus, are you the one we've been waiting for? Or should we keep waiting for the right one to come?"

Jesus thought about this question. And he said, "Go tell John about what you see and hear: that blind people can see again, that people who couldn't walk are now jumping up and down, that people with diseases are healed, that people whose ears didn't work can hear, and that dead people are alive. And that poor people are hearing good news for the first time in their lives. Blessed are people who find nothing wrong with these things I'm doing in God's name."

So the disciples took that message to John. While they were gone, Jesus began to talk to the crowds of people about his cousin John.

"John's not quite what you expected, is he?" Jesus said. "Who did you think he'd be, someone in fancy, soft clothing? People who dress like that live in palaces, not in the desert like John. Did you expect him to be a prophet? Yes, John is a prophet because he tells the truth, even if it's difficult to hear. He is the one the prophets wrote about: 'A messenger will come ahead of you, and make the people ready for you.' John is closer to God and the truth than anyone ever has been; yet he is no better than anyone else in God's kingdom."

The Gospel of the Lord.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

A Reading from the Book of Isaiah [7:10–16]

God spoke to Ahaz again. This time God said, “Ask me to do anything you want as a sign; anything as high as the highest heaven or as deep as the deepest sea. Go ahead ask me for a sign so I can prove myself to you.”

But Ahaz didn’t feel good about that. “I’m not going to ask you to prove yourself, God. I won’t give you a test.”

Isaiah said, “Listen to me, people of the house of David. Is it not enough for you to wear out human beings, do you have to pester God as well? God will give you a sign. Here’s what it will be: A young girl will have a baby, and she will name him Immanuel. By the time he starts walking he’ll have figured out the right way to live, and how to turn away from bad choices. And by the time that happens, the land ruled by the two kings you are scared of will be empty.”

The Word of the Lord.

Psalms 80:1–7, 16–18

You are like the Shepherd of Israel, and we are like your sheep.
Glow brightly, because the angels are surrounding you on
your throne.

As you stand before your people, stir up your strength and come
to help us.

**Make us whole again, O God of all the angels in heaven.
Just show us your shining face and we will be saved.**

God, we cry out our prayers to you day and night. How long will
you be angry with us?

You give us bread made of tears, and bowls filled with tears
to drink.

All our neighbors make fun of us.

**Make us whole again, O God of all the angels in heaven.
Just show us your shining face and we will be saved.**

Rest your hand on the shoulder of your helper, the one you
picked to lead us back to you.

And we will never turn away from you again. Give us life, so that
we can come before you and speak your name.

**Make us whole again, O God of all the angels in heaven.
Just show us your shining face and we will be saved.**

A Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Romans [1:1–7]

We got a letter from Paul, and this is what it says:

I'm Paul, and I serve Jesus Christ himself. I was called to be an
apostle and God gave me special instructions to spread the Good
News. The prophets have been talking about this for centuries,
the Good News about Jesus, God's son. King David was one of
Jesus' great-great-grandfathers. Jesus was also proclaimed Son of
God by his holiness, through his resurrection. Through Jesus we
all have been given a second chance, and have been sent out to
tell people the Good News about God's love for them. I send this
letter in Jesus' name, and along with this letter, I send you grace
and peace from God and God's Son Jesus.

The Word of the Lord.



*The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ According
to Matthew [1:18–25]*

Here's the story of when Jesus was born. Mary, his mother, was engaged to Joseph. But before they were married, Mary found out she was going to have a baby. The Holy Spirit made that happen! Joseph knew people would talk about Mary behind her back because she wasn't married, and he didn't want that to happen to her. So he planned to stop the engagement quietly and no one need know about this baby. That sounded like a good plan to Joseph. But then one night a messenger from God came to him while he was sleeping and said, "Joseph, don't worry about taking Mary as your wife, even though that baby isn't yours. This baby is very special and the Holy Spirit is the reason he will be born. When the baby is born, name him Jesus; he's the one who will save his people from their sin. Don't be afraid, Joseph."

This is what Isaiah was talking about when he said—a young woman will have a baby who will be named Immanuel, which means God is here with us.

When Joseph woke up from that dream, he decided to do just what the messenger from God told him to do. He married Mary, and when her baby was born, he named him Jesus.

The Gospel of the Lord.

The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Christmas Day

A Reading from the Book of Isaiah [9:2–7]

The people who have been walking in the dark for so long have finally seen a great light. You have pumped them up and expanded their joy. They are as happy as people who have harvested a fabulous crop and won't go hungry this year, as happy as people are opening birthday presents, or dividing up found money. They no longer feel like they're pulling someone else's wagon. It's time to throw the boots of the soldiers and their bloody clothes in the fire.

A baby boy has been born for us. He will be someone whom we respect and look up to. And his name is Mighty God, Prince of Peace. His influence will keep growing until there is no end of peace for the family of King David and all who followed him. This baby boy will develop a nation held together with justice and goodness now and always.

The Word of the Lord.

Psalm 96

I've got a brand new song to sing to God.

Everyone, join me in singing it.

I'll sing my new song to God and tell everyone God's news
is the best news ever.

I'll tell people I meet about God's goodness and the wonderful
things he does.

There really isn't anyone or anything like God.

Which is one reason I love God.

I've got a brand new song to sing to God.

Everyone, join me in singing it.