

Service of Morning Prayer Advent 4 – December 18, 2022

Hymn 73, stanzas 1-3 –The King shall come

The King shall come when morning dawns and light triumphant breaks;
When beauty gilds the eastern hills and life to joy awakes.

Not, as of old, a little child, to bear, and fight, and die,
but crowned with glory like the sun that lights the morning sky.

The King shall come when morning dawns and earth's dark night is past;
O haste the rising of that morn, the day that e'er shall last.

BCP - Page 40 - Greeting

Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

BCP – Pages 41 – Invitation to Confession

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our heavenly Father, to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his Holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship him, let us kneel or sit in silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy.

BCP – Pages 41-42 – Confession and Absolution

*Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
we have 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 mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord;*

And grant, O most merciful father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

The almighty and merciful Lord, grant us absolution and remission of all our sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit.
Amen.

BCP – Page 42 - Gloria

O Lord, open thou our lips.
And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

BCP – Pages 44-45 – Venite

O come, let us sing unto the Lord;
 let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,
 and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great god,
 and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are all the corners of the earth,
 and the strength of the hills is his also.
The sea is his and he made it,
 and his hands prepared the dry land.
O come, let us worship and fall down
 and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is the Lord our God,
 and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.
O worship; the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
 let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth,
 and with righteousness to judge the world and the peoples with his truth.

Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

First Reading – Isaiah 7:10-16

Second Reading – Romans 1:1-7

Hymn 54 – Savior of the nations, come!

Savior of the nations, come! Virgin's Son, make here your home.
Marvel now, both heaven and earth, that the Lord chose such a birth.

Wondrous birth! Oh, wondrous child of the Virgin undefiled!
Mighty God and Mary's son, eager now his race to run!

Thus on earth the Word appears, gracing his created spheres;
hence to death and hell descends, then the heavenly throne ascends.

Come, O Father's saving Son, who o'er sin the victory won.
Boundless shall your kingdom be; grant that we its glories see.

Gospel – Matthew 1:18-25

Sermon – The Rev. Daniel Meck

BCP – page 53 - The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;

who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, dead, and buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven.

and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

BCP – page 54 – the Lord’s Prayer

The Lord be with you.

And with thy spirit.

Let us pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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, for ever and ever. Amen.

BCP – page 55 – Suffrages A

O Lord, show thy mercy upon us;

And grant us thy salvation.

Endue thy ministers with righteousness;

And make thy chosen people joyful.

Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;

For only in thee can we live in safety.

Lord, keep this nation under thy care;

And guide us in the way of justice and truth.

Let thy way be known upon earth;

Thy saving health among all nations.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And sustain us with thy Holy Spirit.

Collect for 4th Sunday of Advent

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

BCP Collect for Sundays

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

BCP – pages 58-59 - The General Thanksgiving

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we thine unworthy servants
do give thee most humble and hearty thanks
for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men.*

*We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for thine inestimable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*

*And, we beseech thee,
give us that due sense of all thy mercies,
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful;
and that we show forth thy praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to thy service,
and by walking before thee
in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost,
be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.*

Announcements

Hymn 717 - America – portions of stanzas 1 and 3

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
Long my our land be bright with freedom's holy light;
Protect us by thy might, great God, our King.*

BCP – page 59 – Prayer of St. Chrysostom

*Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our
common supplication unto thee, and hast promised through thy well-beloved Son that
when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the midst of them:
Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may be best for us;
granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life
everlasting. Amen.*

BCP – page 59 – The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *Amen.*

Hymn 66 – Come, thou long expected Jesus

Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art:
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver, born a child, and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins on the 4th Sunday of Advent at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, December 18, 2022.

We are told in the today's lesson from Isaiah (**Isaiah 7:14**) that the Lord will give us a "sign." Today's Psalm (**Psalm 80:18**) suggests that recognizing this "sign" will mean our "salvation." In his letter to the Romans (**Romans 1:7**), Paul suggests that the giving of the "sign" and the "shining" that follows will make a difference in our lives and the lives of others. We will be "called to be saints."

This sequence of giving a sign, receiving a sign, and sharing that sign is what the world needs now, and what the world has always needed.

But look at where this sequence of events begins. The Lord gives us a sign. The Lord takes the initiative. And then the Lord waits for us to receive the sign and share the sign, in the conviction that receiving and sharing the Lord's sign does indeed make a difference in our individual and corporate lives.

So, for today let's consider the Lord's sign. Presumably, by our presence today and throughout this Season of Advent, you and are close to identifying that sign and taking the next step, which is to receive the sign and share it.

Is the sign subtle or dramatic? Is the sign underwhelming or overwhelming? Do we have to work hard at identifying and receiving, or does identifying and receiving come easily.

And when we do receive the sign – the infant Jesus, if you will – what do we do with this little creature? It's the same sign for all of us, but I suspect that our responses vary considerably. And we know plenty of people, don't we, for whom the whole business of signage, both identifying and sharing, is not at the top of their "to do" list or "this is what I want for Christmas" list.

When I think of signs, I think of placards, with large lettering. Picture Mary and Joseph, following the birth of Jesus, carrying a placard around Bethlehem. What would that placard say? "He's here. Come and see the Savior. The angel's promise has been fulfilled."

Would this make a difference for you and me? Would we be convinced by a placard carried by two proud but confused parents?

Well, if the placard suggestion seems far-fetched, what takes its place? What was the convincing sign for you and me? What makes our face “shine”? Surely not a placard. But, if not a placard, what?

Maybe the trigger is simply the notion that God has kept His promise. He said He would send a savior. And, now, it appears that the savior has arrived. This makes God a promise-keeper.

What a gift to you and me. Indeed, it’s why we’re here. It’s why this Season is so special. It’s why we share the baby Jesus and the adult Jesus. God said He would send a savior, and He has done so. We desperately need a savior, and now we have one.

Oh yes, he is just an infant. But he will grow into that adult Savior for whom we have been waiting. And for whom the World waits. This Season of Advent and the Season of Christmas that follows is a game-changer. God has tipped the scale in our favor. It’s called salvation.

And this whole remarkable sequence was not, is not, an accident. It is deliberate. It is a sign of the Divine becoming one of us for the purpose of underscoring the Love between the Creator and the Creation. A Creation that includes you and me.

It’s almost too much to digest. It’s almost too good to be true. It’s a sign that’s not easy to receive, much less to share. But it sure feels as if this infant is indeed God Incarnate, the One for whom we and the whole creation have been waiting.

I like diagrams, especially when the simplicity of the diagram captures the Truth. Our Faith is a simple diagram. It’s a line, going from alpha to omega. And it’s a very long line, but with a few points on the line that capture the Truth. Perhaps the most important point on that line – at least for you and me – is the birth of Jesus. A deliberate insertion in human history that changes hope to reality and beyond.

Of course, Christmas is much deeper than a point on a line. It’s about God entering the Creation in a Love that is unmatched. This entrance by the Creator in our history is confirmation that the Creator is alive and well and thinking about you and me in a manner that we can handle intellectually and spiritually.

The Christ Child is a gift. The baby Jesus and the adult Jesus are signs of God's Love. And they're more than signs. They are God Incarnate. The Creator has chosen to enter our lives as one of us. It's a remarkable story. But it's more than a story. For you and me, the Incarnation is life itself. Not a book to read, but a remarkable person to follow and emulate and – yes – to share.

We don't hide the Christmas Story. We get ready for it with anticipation. We greet it with excitement. And we share that excitement with folks just like you and me.

And, thank God, Mary and Joseph are excited too. What an honor to be selected by God to bear the Son of God. And what an honor to be the mom and to be the dad in this relationship. What an incredibly profound and clever way to fulfill a promise. How fortunate we are. And how fortunate the world is. God chooses to become one of us. What better way to communicate with us. What better way to provide the promise-keeping Sign. And what better way to share the Sign with a world in need of forgiveness and love and a second chance.

It makes you want to share, doesn't it? Which, of course, is not by accident. It turns out that you and I are pretty effective at receiving the Good News and sharing the Good News. The World would be a very different place without Christmas, without our faith. Our observance, including the preparation Season of Advent and the life of Jesus that follows, is not only a blessing for us, but for those with whom we share the Good News.

Yes, as God makes a difference, so do we. Could we make more of a difference? Probably, but we're doing pretty well right now. This chapel and churches of all shapes and sizes perform a service. Not just for those of us within the Church family, but for the whole human family. And that is not an accident. It is quite intentional. The Creator is at work, and so are we. What a privilege to receive the Sign of God's Love and to share that Sign. Not just a point in history, but a glimpse of the whole Creation, remarkably evident in the birth, life, death and resurrection of a first century carpenter.

Merry Christmas, all. Look for the Sign. Follow the Sign. Share the Sign. As God kept His promise, let us keep ours. *Amen.*