

ORDER OF SERVICE
Sunday, December 6, 2020 – 2nd Sunday of Advent
St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Lebanon, OR 97355
Bishop +John S. Thornton, Presiding

A Greeting

Leader: Today is the Second Sunday of Advent and we will light the Candle of Peace. Last Sunday we lit the First Candle in our Advent Wreath, and celebrated the patriarchs, this First Candle reminded us of our hope in Christ. We light it again as we remember our Savior, born a king in the line of King David. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and we believe that he will come again to fulfill all of God's promises to us, to rule the world wisely and bless all nations.

A person lights the first purple candle, the candle of Hope.

As we light the second candle, we remember the prophets who spoke of the coming of Christ, of how a Savior would be born, a king in the line of King David. The prophet Isaiah called Christ "the Prince of Peace". They told us how he would rule the world wisely and bless all the nations. When Jesus came he taught people the importance of being peace-makers. He said that those who make peace shall be called the children of God. When Christ comes to us he brings us peace and he will bring everlasting peace when he comes again. We light the Candle of Peace to remind us that Jesus is the Prince of Peace and that through him peace is found.

A person lights the second purple candle, the candle of Peace.

Peace is like a light shining in a dark place. As we look at this candle, we celebrate the peace we find in Jesus Christ. **Let us pray.**

All: Lord Jesus, Light of the World, the prophets said you would bring peace and save your people from trouble. Give peace in our hearts at Christmastide. We ask that as we wait for you to come again, that you would remain present with us. Help us today, and every day to worship you, to hear your word, and to do your will by sharing your peace with each other. We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem. *Amen.*

Verse 2 of 'O come, o come, Emmanuel' Hymn 56

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go. Refrain

Refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

Acclamation

- ❖ Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- ❖ And blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Trisagion (in unison)

- ❖ *Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have Mercy Upon Us*
- ❖ *Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have Mercy Upon Us*
- ❖ *Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have Mercy Upon Us*

SH'MA YSRA'EL: Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is One." (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Leviticus 19:18)

Collect for Second Sunday in Advent

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Lesson

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.
Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"
See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

1 You have been gracious to your land, O LORD, *
you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.
2 You have forgiven the iniquity of your people *
and blotted out all their sins.
8 I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, *
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to him.
9 Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him, *
that his glory may dwell in our land.
10 Mercy and truth have met together; *
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
11 Truth shall spring up from the earth, *
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.
12 The LORD will indeed grant prosperity, *
and our land will yield its increase.
13 Righteousness shall go before him, *
and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

The Gospel

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of

Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Hymn 76 "On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry"

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
awake and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings of the King of kings.

Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
make straight the way for God within;
prepare we in our hearts a home
where such a mighty guest may come.

For thou art our salvation, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward:
without thy grace, we waste away,
like flowers that wither and decay.

To heal the sick, stretch out thine hand,
and bid the fallen sinner stand;
shine forth and let thy light restore
earth's own true loveliness once more.

All praise, eternal Son, to thee,
whose advent sets thy people free,
whom, with the Father, we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

Sermon "I WITH WATER, HE WITH SPIRIT " +John S.Thornton

" I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

John the Baptizer (or "the Baptist," if you prefer) was not a figment of Mark's imagination. Or Matthew's. Or Luke's. Or John's. Even Josephus, the Jewish historian, refers to him in *The Antiquities*. John the Baptizer was a real person, just as real as a camel's hair tunic – and just as itchy on the thin skin of the powerful in ancient Israel – and just as warm around all those who were kept out of their cold kingdoms.

According to the story called "The Visitation," Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, the mother of John, were cousins. That makes Jesus and John second cousins. John was the older, by a few weeks or months. It's anybody's guess how often they saw each other over the years. Jesus lived in Galilee, John in Judea. There were miles between them. By the time they were about

thirty, they both lived in the reality one called “Lord,” the other “Abba.” Jesus had been a laborer all those years, before becoming an itinerant rabbi. Some scholars speculate that John, like his father, was a priest of the Temple. If he was, he must have given it up or walked out in frustration, to take up the prophet's task, to be a holy terror.

Ever since we were in Sunday School, we've known about John the Baptizer's warbrobe and diet. We blinked and yucked.

Mark says that John's tunic was made of “camel's hair” and that he had “a leather belt around his waist.” That's exactly how Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, dressed too (II Kings 1:8). Whether John, by his own choice, dressed that way or Mark, knowing that the Jews awaited Elijah's return, made it a literary device, nobody can be sure. Let's say that John chose to dress that way, to be identified with Elijah and all the prophets. Prophets were different. They were odd. They were scary. They yelled a lot. And they were fearless. “Death,” as they say, “had no dominium over them.” And, for that reason, they couldn't be ignored. They gave voice to what's true, what's sacred, so what's wrong with us and our societies. For that, they were loved or hated.

As for John's diet, it says that he ate “locusts and wild honey.” Locusts? Bugs? He ate bugs? As a Nazarite, he didn't drink any wine. Just well water. Or river water. In ancient times, the word “locust” was often used to describe the carob tree. People gnawed or sucked on the pods or ground them up for cooking. (I have one here. It's called “St. John's Bread.”) Carob pods are sweet, though they're definitely a poor man's chocolate.

As time went by, “locust” was used to describe certain insects. Though the Torah forbids the consumption of insects, it does allow for one exception: insects that (a) swarm and (b) leap. Crickets swarm and leap. So do grasshoppers. And, yes, locusts. All three could be consumed. In John's time, locusts came up to Palestine from Egypt in hordes. Instead of just swatting them and cursing them, people ate them. They still do. There are places in the world today, including Israel, where you can get deep-fried or chocolate-covered locusts. It's not preposterous to believe that John ate locusts – and gnawed and sucked on the pods of carob trees.

It's John message that we have to hear. In a word, his message was “repent.” We've forgotten who we are, he shouted. We've forgotten that we were delivered from slavery in Egypt. We've forgotten that we wandered in the desert for forty years and, somehow, survived. We've forgotten that we entered into a covenant with the Lord. We've forgotten the commandments that bind us together in peace. We've forgotten that we were led through the Jordan into this land flowing with milk and honey. We've forgotten everything that makes us a light to the nations. Repent. Let's go back to the Jordan, cleanse our hearts and start all over again, a new people, chosen to be humble, chosen to be merciful, chosen to the just. (That was John Winthrop's vision for America too.)

Matthew's Gospel says that “the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him.” Well, probably not all of them. Not all the beautiful people of Jerusalem, who felt favored by anybody's god. They had their salvation, thank you. But tax collectors, the rats, went out to hear him. And prostitutes too. Aha, now that's an important point. By immersion in the water of the Jordan, unlike circumcision, women, as well as men, were equal in the Kingdom of God. It was so daring, so wonderfully daring. And then came Jesus, John's second cousin, down from Nazareth, to wade

into the Jordan with all the rest, one of them, one with them – and one with God. It was so daring, so wonderfully daring.

John the Baptizer's life came to a hideous end. Beyond telling the truth, he had no needs, except for that tunic made of camel's hair and wild honey and carob pods and locusts. He couldn't be bought. Kings couldn't silence him. When Herod the Great died, the Emperor Tiberius divided Palestine into three parts, one for each of Herod's three favored sons, Archelaus, Antipas and Philip. Actually, there were more sons and scads of daughters. Herod had had ten wives, one after the other. He didn't bother to divorce them; he either sent them into exile or had them executed. Marriage to Herod was temporary and dangerous and, often, fatal. Time, but not testosterone, went by and Antipas (who, somehow, got away with being called "Herod" too) managed to get his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, into bed. Or Herodias managed to get Herod in bed. They made it legal. Enter John the Baptizer, lambasting Herod and Herodias for their violation of Torah. Torah forbade a man's marrying his brother's wife, unless it was a "levirate" marriage, which meant that the brother had to be dead first. Philip was not dead. John the Baptizer went public. To shut him up, Herod had him thrown into prison. He would have put him to death, except that John was so popular among the people of Judea. However, at Herod's birthday party, Herodias' daughter, Salome, did her "dance of the seven veils." Herod had been drinking too much and incest was dancing in his head. In his stupor, he vowed, vociferously, to give Salome anything she wanted. (My theological consultant reminded that that's the Hollywood version. Both Mark and Matthew, he said, present Herod as a fop and Herodias as a gold-digger and manipulator.) Salome consulted her mom. Her mom had been nursing a grudge against John the Baptizer for months. Nobody lectured her on Torah! Ask, she told her daughter, for the Baptizer's head on a platter. So she asked. Herod, though appalled, had no choice but to order it. In came the Baptizer's head, on a platter – and the candles on the cake were blown out – or however they ushered in the darkness.

In all of history, few people have had a clearer understanding of themselves. I'm not Elijah come again. I'm not the Messiah. I'm John. And "the more he (Jesus) increases, the more I decrease." "I'm not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals." "I have baptized you with water, but he Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." He was, modestly though emphatically, the "forerunner."

Now you are. You're the forerunner. Sure, look to others. There are thousands, millions of people who are preparing the way every day. But look to yourself. You, by your love, inspire love in others. Your life, sociologists say, directly affects, on average, the lives of eighty-five others.

By your love of gentleness, you inspire gentleness.

By your love of kindness, you inspire kindness.

(I keep a saying of St. Seraphim of Sarov, the patron saint of Russia, in our barn;

"Men cannot be too gentle, too kind.")

By your love of liberality, you inspire liberality.

By your love of mercy, you inspire mercy.

By your love of living in peace with everyone, you inspire living in peace with everyone.

By your love of the truth, you inspire the love of truth.

By your love for fairness and justness and the equality of persons, you inspire the love of fairness and justness and the equality of persons.

Look to yourself. You're the one who, by the way you live your life, proclaim, "Behold the Lamb of God."

In place of the Creed, we will say **the ancient hymn -Philippians 2: 6-11 (NEB)**

"For the divine nature was his from the first;
yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God,
but made himself nothing,
assuming the nature of a slave.
Bearing the human likeness,
revealed in human shape,
he humbled himself,
and in obedience accepted even death –
death on a cross.

Therefore God raised him to the heights
and bestowed on him the name above all names,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bow –
in heaven, on earth, and in the depths –
and every tongue confess
'Jesus Christ is Lord'
to the glory of God the Father."

Prayers

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,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Blessings

The Peace

Dismissal