

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY

27 November

The First Sunday in Advent & Harvest Thanksgiving

HYMNS: 564 814 Printed 563

THE LIGHTING OF THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE

M: The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I shall raise up to David a righteous branch, a King who will reign and do what is just and right in the land.

C: **This is the name by which He will be called: the Lord our Righteousness.**

Prayer: Lord, You let Your people wait for four thousand years while You were preparing the coming of their salvation. Send us Your Holy Spirit, that we may, through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, rightly prepare for His coming into our hearts, and for His final coming. Amen.

INTROIT:

You receive praise in silence in Zion, O God, and vows to You will be fulfilled. O You who hear prayer, to You all human beings will come.

Iniquitous things have been prevailing over me. You Yourself will provide atonement for our rebellious actions.

Blessed is the person whom You choose and whom You bring near, that he may dwell in Your courts! We shall be satisfied with the good things of Your house, the holiness of Your temple.

You answer us in righteousness with awesome deeds, O our saving God, the Confidence of all the ends of the earth and of the most distant sea.

He is the One who sets the mountains in place by His strength, the One who puts on strength like a waistcloth.

He is the One who calms the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the peoples.

Those who live at the ends of the earth have been in awe of Your miraculous signs. You make the places where morning dawns and the places where evening fades shout for joy.

You have taken care of the land and have caused it to overflow. You have enriched it abundantly. The stream of God is filled with water. You are providing their grain. For that is how You have prepared it.

You have given its furrows their fill of drink, and levelled off the edges of its furrows. You soften it with gentle rain, and bless its growth.

You have crowned the year of Your goodness, and Your wheel-tracks drip with fat.

The pastures in the desert overflow. The hills are robed with joy.

The meadows are clothed with flocks, and the valleys are covered with grain.

They are shouting for joy. Indeed, they are singing.

Psalm 65

COLLECT: Almighty God, You crown the fields with Your blessing and permit us to gather in the fruits of the earth. As stewards of Your creation, may we receive Your gifts in humble thankfulness and share Your bounty with those in need; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS: Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Firstfruits presented to the LORD.
 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 Sowing generously.
 Luke 12:13-21 The Parable of the rich fool.

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

¹ “When you enter the land that the LORD, your God, is giving you as an inheritance and you take possession of it and live in it, ² you shall take some of the first from all the produce of the ground, which you will harvest from your land, which the LORD, your God, is giving you! You shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD, your God, will choose to make His name dwell! ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and tell him, ‘I declare today to the LORD, your God, that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us!’ ⁴ Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD, your God! ⁵ You shall make this response before the LORD, your God: ‘My forefather was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with few people and lived as a foreigner there. There he became a great, powerful and numerous nation. ⁶ However, the Egyptians treated us harshly, oppressed us and imposed severe forced labour on us. ⁷ Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our forefathers, and the LORD heard our cry. He saw our misery, distress and oppression. ⁸ The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. ⁹ He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ So now, look! I have brought the first produce of the land, which You, O LORD, have given me.’ Then you shall set it down before the LORD, your God, and worship before the LORD, your God! ¹¹ Then you shall be glad about all the good things that the LORD, your God, has given to you and your family, together with the Levite and the foreigner who is living among you!

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

⁶ In addition, I say this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each person should give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion! For God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ God can make all grace abound toward you, that you may always have all that you need in every way and may abound in every good work, ⁹ as Scripture has said: “He has distributed. He has given to the poor. His righteousness remains for ever.” ¹⁰ He who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and will increase what your righteousness produces. ¹¹ You are being made rich in every way that

you may be totally generous. This is producing thanksgiving to God through us. ¹² This work, which you are doing in serving others, not only supplies the needs of the believers but is also overflowing through many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ By this service, by which you prove yourselves, you are glorifying God for your subordinate confession of the Good News of Christ and for your generous contribution to them and to all people, ¹⁴ while they also long for you deeply and pray for you, because of the extreme kindness that God has shown you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Luke 12:13-21

¹³ Someone in the crowd asked Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!”

¹⁴ Jesus asked him, “Man, who appointed Me to be a judge or an arbitrator over you?”

¹⁵ Then He told them, “Beware and be on your guard against all greed! For a person’s life does not consist in how plentiful his possessions are.”

¹⁶ Then Jesus told them a parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What am I to do? For I have no place to store my produce.’

¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘This is what I shall do: I shall pull down my barns and build bigger ones and shall store my grain and all my other goods in them. ¹⁹ Then I shall say to myself, ‘Soul, you have many good things stored up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and enjoy yourself!’”

²⁰ “However, God said to him, ‘You fool, this very night your life will be demanded of you. Then who will get the things that you have prepared?’”

²¹ Jesus said, “So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

YOUR FAITHFULNESS IS GREAT

Sermon for Harvest Thanksgiving

Lamentations 3:22-33

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Lamentations 3:22-33: **It is because of the LORD’s mercies that we have not been completely cut off. For His compassion has not come to an end.**

²³ **It is new every morning. Your faithfulness is great.**

²⁴ **I have been saying to myself, “The LORD is my portion. Therefore, I shall put my hope in Him.”**

²⁵ **The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.**

²⁶ **It is good that one hopes, even in silence, for the salvation of the LORD.**

²⁷ **It is good for a person to carry a yoke while he is young.**

²⁸ **He should sit alone and keep silent. For the LORD has laid it on him.**

29 He should put his mouth in the dust. Perhaps there is hope.

30 He should offer his cheek to the one who strikes him and receive plenty of insults.

31 For the Lord will not reject for ever.

32 However, if He has caused grief, He will show compassion, because His mercies are very great.

33 For He has not taken pleasure in tormenting human beings or in oppressing them.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Giving thanks to the Lord for His great faithfulness is always appropriate at all times and in all circumstances, but I think what will deepen our thoughts on this Harvest Thanksgiving Day is to know the *context* for these verses from Lamentations. What was going on in the life of the person who wrote these words? It sounds like this person's life must have been going pretty great that he would pour forth such beautiful words of praise.

Well, no - and *that's the point*. This person's life was not going great. Rather, it was quite the opposite. And it was the same for the land in which he lived. Things were stinking, lousy, and miserable. Think of it. After all, the name of this book is "Lamentations," which means poems of lament, mourning, and sadness. And yet in the midst of the mourning - and this passage in chapter 3 is literally smack dab in the middle of the book - the poet breaks out in this song celebrating the Lord's faithfulness. I think there's a lesson in this for us today, in our context, both in our personal lives and in the life of our country.

The man who wrote Lamentations was almost surely the prophet Jeremiah, the "*weeping prophet*," as he is called. Jeremiah was filled with sadness at the strong words of judgment he had to preach against unfaithful Judah and Jerusalem. Judgment was coming, doom and gloom and judgment, and there was no stopping it. The LORD was going to bring the Babylonians against Judah, who would take the people off into captivity. Judgment was coming in particular against Jerusalem and even against the temple itself. The Babylonians would destroy the city and level the temple to the ground.

All of which is exactly what happened. The judgment did come. Jerusalem was destroyed, as was the temple in 586 B.C. Terrible, awful judgment. And certainly, that is a major theme in this book of Lamentations, namely, mourning for the fate of Jerusalem. Listen to the laments. The book opens like this: "*How lonely sits the city that had been crowded with people! How she who had been great among the nations has become like a widow! She who had been a princess among the provinces has had*

to do forced labour” (1:1). Jerusalem is personified as a humiliated, deserted widow. Unsuppressed sobbing rends the air as the bliss of former days are contrasted with the present nightmare of shame and destitution. The stricken mourners repeatedly confess that the LORD was justified in letting the Babylonians destroy Zion, for she had “*sinned greatly*” and had become “*filthy*” (vv 8, 17). Sadly, Jerusalem herself must confess: “*The LORD is in the right. For I have rebelled against His Word*” (1:18).

Dear friends, on this day, when we think about our own nation, we too must confess, “We have rebelled against God’s Word.” How Australia is ripe for God’s judgment! Think of it. Our nation has legalised murder in the form of abortion, causing the holocaust of thousands of unborn children. Our nation has approved the abomination of homosexuality, even legalising so-called “single-sex marriage,” which is an impossibility. Immorality and violence - the same vices that brought the flood upon the earth and fire and brimstone down on Sodom and Gomorrah - immorality and violence run rampant in our land and pour out of our televisions and movie screens and computer screens. None of us are immune, we glory in our shame, calling good evil and evil good.¹ Truly Australia is ripe for judgment, just like Judah was in the days of Jeremiah.

And the Lord’s judgment did fall on Judah. The prophet laments: “*The Lord has become like an enemy. He has swallowed up Israel. He has swallowed up all its fortified palaces. He has laid its fortified cities in ruins. He has increased the mourning and lamentation in the daughter of Judah*” (2:5).

And Jeremiah himself, even though he did not go along with the rebellion of the people - even so, he felt the weight and the anguish of God’s judgment falling on the land. He writes: “*I am the man who has seen affliction under of the rod of His fury. I am the one whom He has driven away and whom He has made to walk in darkness without a light. Surely, He was turning His hand against me repeatedly, all day long*” (3:1-3).

Maybe you feel like this sometimes. Maybe you feel like a man or woman who has seen affliction. It may seem like God has become your enemy. You cannot see any light at the end of the tunnel. Aging, illness, affliction, financial reverses, family breakups, distress over the direction your children are going - so many causes of grief we experience in this world! And we wonder *where God is in the midst of all this.* Sometimes we feel just like Jeremiah when he says of the LORD, “*He caused me to grind my teeth on gravel. He trampled me down in ashes. You excluded my soul from*

¹ Isaiah 5:20

peace. I forgot happiness. I thought, “My splendour and my hope have been ruined because of the LORD” (3:16-18).

But even at this low point - a low point for Jeremiah, a low point for Jerusalem and Judah - something begins to nudge the prophet in the direction of hope. He writes: *“Remember my suffering and my homelessness, the wormwood and the bitterness! My soul continues to remember them and bends down over me. This is the thing that I call to mind, and this is why I have hope” (3:19-21).*

“This is the thing that I call to mind, and this is why I have hope.” This is the turning point in Jeremiah’s lamentation. His thoughts turn now to the steadfast love of the LORD, God’s great covenant love that He has pledged to all who put their trust in Him. And this is where we pick up the words of our text: **“It is because of the LORD’s mercies that we have not been completely cut off. For His compassion has not come to an end. ²³ It is new every morning. Your faithfulness is great. ²⁴ I have been saying to myself, “The LORD is my portion. Therefore, I shall put my hope in Him.”**

Dear friends, there is hope for you! There is hope for us! This hope is found solely in the steadfast love of the LORD, in His mercies, which are new every morning. The LORD’s great faithfulness to His covenant, His faithfulness to His promises, all fulfilled in Christ - this is what gives us hope and a song to sing on this day when we gather the fruits of God’s harvest and come into His house of worship and praise!

Think of this: Christ Jesus, the very Son of God - He is truly the man who has seen affliction, once and for all. The man of sorrows, who bore the sins and the grief of His people, when He bore our sins on the wood of the cross. He took the judgment we deserve, each one of us, taking the sentence for our sin on His sinless shoulders. Jesus deserved only praise and commendation. Yet He suffered shame and condemnation, innocently, on our behalf. See the steadfast love of the Lord that He would do this!

Now we are counted righteous and forgiven on account of this Righteous One. Through faith in Christ, every believer has eternal life now and on forever into the age to come. In Him is life, and this life is the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.² God, in His mercy, has allowed this light to continue to shine in our sin-darkened land. The Gospel light has not been snuffed out here in Australia. To be sure, more and more of our countrymen are turning away from the Lord in unbelief. But there is a faithful remnant, and the Lord

² John 1:5

is gracious enough to not allow our land to be destroyed.

“His compassion has not come to an end.” By God’s mercy, Australia is still a very prosperous land, by world standards, in spite of our many sins. We still enjoy the freedom to practice our religion - although that freedom is being increasingly threatened by our government. The crops of our fields are yielding their harvest in abundance. The natural resources Australia has are just amazing. The brainpower and industry of still many of our citizens are a great blessing to us. These all are things to give thanks to God for on this day.

But what about when our sight is filled by the adversity of our circumstances? Do you ever feel like God has become your enemy? Join the club. Join Jeremiah in his lamentations. But join Jeremiah also in his hope and thanksgiving, as when he says: **“For the Lord will not reject for ever. ³² However, if He has caused grief, He will show compassion, because His mercies are very great. ³³ For He has not taken pleasure in tormenting human beings or in oppressing them.”**

Luther comments on this passage and says: *“God stands hidden among the sufferings which would separate us from him like a wall, indeed, like a wall of a fortress. And yet he looks upon me and does not forsake me. He stands there and is ready to help in grace, and through the window of dim faith he permits himself to be seen.”*

Dear friends, this is the word of hope for you today: Even when the loving God seems hidden from you, hidden in your sufferings, you know a faithful God, who is true to His Word, and He will see you through. The message today is this: Because of God’s great faithfulness, thanksgiving is possible even when things are not going so great. Just ask Jeremiah. For because God’s promises are all fulfilled in Christ, then even in the midst of our lamentations, hope and thanksgiving ring out. How great is God’s faithfulness! Amen.

HYMN 809 LSB - GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS

1

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
Thou changest not: Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou for ever wilt be.

*Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

2

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
 Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
 Join with all nature in manifold witness
 To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

*Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
 Morning by morning new mercies I see;
 All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided;
 Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

3

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
 Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
 Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
 Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

PRAYER FOR HARVEST THANKSGIVING

God our Father, You have created the universe in great wisdom, and sustain it by Your powerful word. You are good to everyone, and have compassion on all that You have made. We enter Your house of prayer with thanksgiving, and come before You with songs of joy. We thank You for the many blessings and joys You lavish on our lives. We thank You for soil and seed, sunlight and rain, health and strength, machinery and technology, and every other blessing by which You give us our daily bread. You have given us a plentiful land, rich in resources for agriculture, mining, and industry. You have blessed us with education and skills to use these resources for the good of our country and its people. Although You do not always spare us from trouble and dark days, we still must confess that our cup of blessing is overflowing, and so we praise Your name. Make us continually aware of Your goodness, O Lord. Increase our trust that in all things You are working for our good.

But, Lord, You not only care for our bodies; Your richest love is reserved for the salvation of our souls. Because You have revealed Yourself to us in Your Word, we know You in Your limitless grace, and live in the light of Your truth and love. We thank You especially for Your greatest of gifts: Jesus Christ our Saviour, and for all the blessings of the Gospel and the Church. Help us to appreciate fully these choicest gifts, and to produce in our lives a rich harvest of faith, goodness, and love.

Free us from every temptation to trust in uncertain things like material wealth. Free us from covetousness, envy, and jealousy. Increase our joy in what You provide, and make us content. Make us more sensitive to what others need. Give us compassion to help those who have too little, and the opportunities to share Your blessings. Let our service to others

pave the way for witness to the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ Your Son. Teach us to use wisely the things You place at our disposal.

Bless and strengthen the poor and the hungry, those who cannot work, the lonely, the depressed, and especially those who are suffering because of their Christian faith. Give them all the generous help of friends, but, above all, strong trust in Your presence and care.

Guide the nations on earth, and particularly those countries whose people are desperately poor. Grant that all who look up to You for material blessings may find Your kingdom, and Your righteousness. Bless our country Australia with a united spirit and godly goals. Teach its leaders and its people to know, believe, and do Your will. Remove from us things that are unwise and harmful.

Continue to supply the spiritual needs of our families, so that truth, love, and high morals may bless our homes.

We offer You our prayers and our songs of praise, heavenly Father, in the name of Your dear Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and honour for ever. Amen.

Article - Hope Can be Difficult

Hope can be a difficult thing to keep alive. We all struggle to keep an optimistic outlook. Not all that we hope for is realised and seen in our lifetimes. Disappointment guts the heart of our hope. We assume that what is unrealised in our time is unrealised forever. We strain to see beyond today, let alone years into the future. Even the ancients, the writer to the Hebrews tells us, “*died in faith, not having received the things promised.*” Yet the writer also tells us that they saw them and greeted them “*from afar*” (Heb. 11:13). Faith must see things as God sees them, from His perspective, in the context of eternity. Thus, the Word to which faith clings upholds faith with heaven-born promises anchored in the eternal Christ.

Abraham, who received a promise of his own much like Zechariah’s, faced the same seemingly unbelievable possibility of fulfilment. Paul tells us that “*in hope he believed against hope*” (Rom. 4:18). His body was “*as good as dead*” given his advanced age of about a hundred years. Sarah’s womb, like Elizabeth’s, was barren. No earthly hope. Yet faith believed against that dead-ended hope. It hoped based entirely upon what God could do, anchored in His word of assurance. No distrust could shake Abraham, because he was “*fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised*” (Rom. 4:19, 21).

Many of our hopes come from mere wishes and desires for temporary enjoyments. As we get older, we understand how to handle the disappointments that come when they are not realised; so our hopes are conditioned. You just know some things are no more than wishful thinking with little basis in reality. But some of our hopes arise out of moments of crushing crises like serious sickness and impending death. We need certain hopes to come true. We try to hope when calamity strikes and leaves our lives in shambles and shattered fragments. We pray fervently. We hope with every fibre of our spirit. We try to hang on to optimism despite repeated disappointments. Time passes. Hours turn into days. Days turn into weeks. Weeks turn into years. How long can we hope?

But hope born of faith fights doubts only when it is anchored in Christ. And such hopes transcend our own limited desires. Zechariah and Elizabeth could hardly imagine how their long-hoped-for son would become the very forerunner of God's own Son. They would learn that when God sends a heavenly messenger like Gabriel from the very presence of God Himself, the promise will not be the foundation of small and limited hopes. You and I, as those baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ, live within great and grand hopes, Christ-filled hopes, hopes that concern the defeat of death and the gift of abundant life. Gabriel's message therefore comes also to us, concerns each of us in our own disappointments. Look beyond this moment, the messenger tells us. Look beyond your own personal and limited desires. Look to the larger story, the greater plan. Look to the grand plans God has for you in Christ's death and resurrection, plans like those announced to the prophet Jeremiah in his own difficult times: "*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I shall hear you. You will seek Me and find Me*" (Jer. 29:11-13). Yes, God has plans for each of us as well. And these plans in Christ are for our greater good, a good we often cannot even begin to imagine in the darkness of our struggles.

Welcome to all worshipping with us today!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaalc@gmail.com.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

Children's Message:

God's Megaphone

Do you know what a megaphone is? A megaphone is something you use to make your voice louder so people can hear you better.

One of today's Bible readings is from a book written by a man named Isaiah. Isaiah is known as a prophet, because God sent him to tell God's people things they needed to hear. A prophet was basically a megaphone for God, someone that God spoke through.



Can you think of some people today who are basically like a megaphone for God, who share God's Word with you so you can hear it better? Perhaps you could think of your parents, your grandparents, your pastor, or your Sunday School teacher - all of them speak God's Word to you. This week maybe thank those people for speaking the Word of Jesus to you 😊. Thanks to them, you know God and believe in Him; thanks to the people who brought you to be baptised, your own parents, you have become God's child and a member of His kingdom.

As I said, Isaiah was one of these people God used to speak for Him. We're going to hear from Isaiah not only today but for the next three Sundays in church. Isaiah is one of the men God especially used to tell people what we're talking about these upcoming Sundays. These Sundays, this season, we call Advent, when we talk about God's Son coming into our world. Isaiah's going to tell us why Jesus has come: God the Father does not like it when we sin, but He has sent Jesus to take our sin away, sending Him to be born as a baby at Christmas, then to grow up and be our Saviour by dying on the cross.



Let's pray. *Dear Lord Jesus, I thank You that You have come into the world to save me. Thank You for all the people who preach your Word to me. Help me to hear You. Amen.*

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

COMING SERVICES

4 December 2 Advent	11 December 3 Advent	18 December 4 Advent
10.00am HC & Downs Children’s Christmas Service at Greenwood. 9.00am MARBURG LR	8.30am OAK LR 8.30am TMBa HC (note time) 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN PR Harvest Festival & Baptism 7.00pm MARBURG Children’s Christmas Program	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBa LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG HC 7.00pm Carols Evening at Toowoomba
Sunday, 4 December		
READINGS: Isaiah 11:1-10;	Romans 15:4-13;	Matthew 3:1-12
HYMNS: 12 13 2 622		
Sunday, 11 December		
READINGS: Isaiah 35:1-10;	James 5:7-11;	Matthew 11:2-15
HYMNS: 15 17 739 (325 290) 510 GRN: 276 15 809 (from the LSB) 17		

Tonight, 6.30pm. Advent Tea at Aubigny. Could each family please provide a plate and something for dessert? An Advent program will be held after tea.

Next Sunday, 4 December. Could the Sunday School children please be at the church at 9.00am for a practice run through of the program? Also, members, please bring something for a shared lunch.

Saturday, 10 December, 10.30am. The bookclub are meeting at the manse. Members, remember, we were to read up to page 69.

Please take home with you today a copy of the Advent Devotions booklet.

Weekly sermons and bulletins are available at www.aelc.org.au.

Weekly Sunday School lessons are also now available in the Members section.

If there are any late changes to be made to divine services, these will be listed immediately on the website, and a text sent out to members.

If you are unsure, please contact pastor.