

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKY
11 December
The Third Sunday in Advent

HYMNS: 15 17 739 510

THE LIGHTING OF THE THIRD ADVENT CANDLE

R: Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.

C: Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.'

ALL: Lord, hear our prayers, and graciously prepare us for Your coming. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

INTROIT: Psalm 146

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!

Let me praise the LORD throughout my life! Let me sing praise to my God as long as I live!

Do not trust in noble people, in a descendant of Adam, who cannot save! When his spirit departs, he will return to his earth. On that day his plans will perish.

Blessed is the one who has the God of Jacob for his help! His hope is in the LORD, his God, who has made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who remains faithful for ever, who provides justice for those who are oppressed, and who gives food to those who are hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free.

The LORD opens the eyes of blind people. The LORD raises up those who are bowed down. The LORD loves righteous people.

The LORD watches over resident-foreigners. He helps up the orphan and the widow. However, He makes the way of wicked people crooked.

The LORD will reign for ever, Your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

COLLECT: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

READINGS: Isaiah 35:1-10 He will come and save you.
 James 5:7-11 Until the Lord comes.
 Matthew 11:2-15 Are You the One who is coming?

Isaiah 35:1-10

¹ The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a crocus. ² The land will blossom richly. It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and of Sharon. These will see the glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God. ³ **Strengthen the slack hands and make the stumbling knees firm!** ⁴ Say to those whose hearts are dismayed: “Be strong, do not be afraid! Look! Your God will come with vengeance, with the retribution of God. He Himself will come and save you!”

⁵ Then **the eyes of blind people will be opened, and the ears of deaf people will be opened.** ⁶ Then **the lame man will** leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb man will shout for joy. For water will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. ⁷ Then the parched ground will become a pool, and the thirsty ground will become springs of water. In the haunts where jackals lay, the grass will become reeds and papyrus. ⁸ A highway will be there, a roadway. It will be named “The Holy Way.” No unclean person will travel on it. It will be for those who walk on that way. Stubborn fools will not wander about there. ⁹ No lion will be there, and no predatory animals will come up on it. They will not be found there, but the redeemed will walk there. ¹⁰ Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return. They will enter Zion with singing. Everlasting joy will be on their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

James 5:7-11

⁷ Therefore, be patient, fellow-Christians, until the Lord comes! See how the farmer waits for the valuable crop of the ground and waits patiently for it until it receives **the Autumn and the Spring rains!** ⁸ You too, be patient and remain firm! For the Lord’s coming is near. ⁹ Do not grumble against

one another, fellow-Christians, that you may not be judged! Consider! The Judge is standing in front of the door. ¹⁰ Fellow-Christians, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of being patient in the face of wrong treatment! ¹¹ Remember that **we call those people “blessed” who have persevered.** You have heard how Job persevered and have seen what the Lord finally brought about, because **the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.**

Matthew 11:2-15

² When John had heard in prison about what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples, ³ to ask Him, “Are You the One who is coming, or are we to expect someone else?”

⁴ Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you are hearing and seeing: ⁵ **Blind people are receiving their sight** again, lame people are walking, lepers are being made clean, **deaf people are hearing**, the dead are being raised, and **poor people are being told the Good News.** ⁶ Blessed is anyone who is not offended because of Me!”

⁷ When John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed driven back and forth by the wind? ⁸ What did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft robes? Look! Those who wear soft robes are in kings’ palaces. ⁹ What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, even someone greater than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom Scripture has said: ‘**Look! I am sending My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way before You.**’ ¹¹ Truly, I tell you, no one among those born by women has appeared who is greater than John the Baptist. Yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been advancing with triumphant force, and violent men are laying hold of it. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ If you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵ Let the one who has ears hear!

PARADISE RESTORED
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday in Advent, 2022
Isaiah 35:1-10

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 our First Reading from before, Isaiah 35:1-10: **The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a crocus. ² The land will blossom richly. It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and of Sharon. These will see the glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God. ³ Strengthen the slack hands and make the stumbling knees firm! ⁴ Say to those whose hearts are dismayed: “Be strong, do not be afraid! Look! Your God will come with vengeance, with the retribution of God. He Himself will come and save you!”**

⁵ Then the eyes of blind people will be opened, and the ears of deaf people will be opened. ⁶ Then the lame man will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb man will shout for joy. For water will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. ⁷ Then the parched ground will become a pool, and the thirsty ground will become springs of water. In the haunts where jackals lay, the grass will become reeds and papyrus. ⁸ A highway will be there, a roadway. It will be named “The Holy Way.” No unclean person will travel on it. It will be for those who walk on that way. Stubborn fools will not wander about there. ⁹ No lion will be there, and no predatory animals will come up on it. They will not be found there, but the redeemed will walk there. ¹⁰ Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return. They will enter Zion with singing. Everlasting joy will be on their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

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

Dear friends in Christ,

In chapter 34 of Isaiah, we learn how the LORD is *angry*. There, we read how the stars and sky will be dissolved; how blood from slaughter will bathe the landscape; how Edom will burn and lie desolate; how nothing will be left to call a kingdom; and how desert creatures will inhabit the land. This is because that chapter focuses on the LORD's coming judgment on all nations, which is in complete contrast to what we find today in chapter 35. Here, we learn how **the land will blossom richly; the slack hands and stumbling knees [will become] firm; the eyes of blind people will be opened, and the ears of deaf people will be opened; the lame man will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb man will shout for joy; the parched ground will become a pool, and the thirsty ground will become springs of water; A highway will be there, a roadway, on which the redeemed will walk. Here is the coming salvation of the LORD's exiled people. It is difficult to imagine a sharper contrast. Yes, the Lord God Himself *is coming*, and Isaiah writes, **“Be strong, do not be afraid! Look! Your God will come with vengeance, with the retribution of God. He Himself will come and save you!”****

As Isaiah wrote this prophecy, he was looking ahead to a time when the people of God would need saving. That would be when Judah would be taken captive to Babylon, some years after the time of Isaiah. The Babylonian Captivity would be a great tragedy for God's people as their enemies would defeat them. Jerusalem, and the temple itself, would be destroyed. The people of Judah would be taken off as exiles, living in a strange land, and ruled by a pagan emperor. Things couldn't get much worse.

It is to a situation like this, when people feel powerless and shaky and worried, that Isaiah speaks a word of hope. He says, **“Strengthen the slack hands and make the stumbling knees firm! ⁴ Say to those whose hearts are dismayed: “Be strong, do not be afraid! Look! Your God will come with vengeance, with the retribution of God. He Himself will come and save you!”**

He comes. The Lord, your God, is coming, and He is coming to save you. He will come with vengeance and retribution. He will defeat your enemies for you and deliver you from their hands. And indeed, that is what happened in the case of Judah at the time of the Babylonian Captivity. Eventually, Persia defeated Babylon in the year 539 B.C., and the following year, the Persian emperor Cyrus told the Judean exiles they could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. But really, it was the Lord, the God of Israel, who made this happen.

He comes, we come. The Lord comes to save His people, and then they come: The people of God come out of exile back home to where they belong. Isaiah foretells this too. He foresees a highway running through the wilderness, sort of a divine express lane running straight from Babylon back to Jerusalem. He writes, **“A highway will be there, a roadway. It will be named “The Holy Way.” No unclean person will travel on it. It will be for those who walk on that way. Stubborn fools will not wander about there.⁹ No lion will be there, and no predatory animals will come up on it. They will not be found there, but the redeemed will walk there.”**

It is the redeemed who will be travelling on this holy highway, the ones whom the Lord has set free from their captivity, and they will be heading home. **“Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return. They will enter Zion with singing. Everlasting joy will be on their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”**

He comes, we come. When the Lord comes and redeems His people from their captivity, they will come. They will return to Zion, the dwelling place of the Lord in the midst of His people. And Judah did come back to Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and they did rebuild the temple. That did come true for the people of Judah.

But is that all Isaiah is prophesying here? No, it seems like more, much more, that God has in mind. The fulfilment of this prophecy would be something *much greater*. After all, Isaiah here speaks of **“everlasting joy”** and that **“sorrow and sighing will flee away.”** But that everlasting dimension of joy did not come to pass for Judah. Eventually, the temple would be destroyed again, this time by the Romans, and it has never been rebuilt since.

No, Isaiah has something far greater than he’s prophesying here. And it is the ultimate “He comes, we come” of all time. The enemies are far worse than the Babylonians and the Romans. The captives, the exiles, are far more than just the Judeans. The distress is much deeper, and the outcome is much greater and far more glorious.

He comes, we come. This time the “He” is still the Lord God. But it is the Lord God come in the flesh, in the person of the baby boy Jesus. He comes to save us. Even His name, “Jesus,” means *“The Lord saves.”* Jesus comes to save us.

And we are the people He comes to save. Not just Judah. Not just the Jews. But us Gentiles too. All sinners, far and near, for ours is a distress that spans the

globe. The shroud of death covers all of mankind, for we all have sinned and have earned death by our sins. We are the captives; we are the exiles. We were far off from the Promised Land, exiles driven out of the Garden, cut off from the tree of life. We were strangers, separated from God by our sins.

But God comes; He comes to save us. He comes in the only way possible to save us. He comes as our Brother. The Son of God comes as one of us, so He can fulfil all righteousness for us, dying the sinner's death in place of all of us. Only the Son of God could do that, and He has done so.

Jesus comes with a vengeance; He comes with divine recompense. He defeats our enemies for us, our biggest enemies, sin and Satan and death. All of them were defeated, when Jesus stomped on the devil's head even as He died on the cross. Now the devil's accusations are empty. Now the sins of God's people are forgiven by the shedding of Christ's blood from the cross. The devil's power is broken, and his domain is shattered. Eternal life awaits all those who trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus comes, and so we come. Jesus comes to save us. We come home to Zion, and what is it that we shall find there? **“Then the eyes of blind people will be opened, and the ears of deaf people will be opened. ⁶ Then the lame man will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb man will shout for joy. For water will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. ⁷ Then the parched ground will become a pool, and the thirsty ground will become springs of water. In the haunts where jackals lay, the grass will become reeds and papyrus.”**

These words tell of the beautiful restoration of creation! Everything that went wrong with the fall into sin, the curse upon the land and upon humanity - all that will be reversed. Paradise restored, and then some. Streams in the desert. Where there was arid wasteland, now there will be beauty and fruitfulness. Even our bodies will be fixed up, better than new. Eyes, seeing sharp and clear again. Ears, hearing like they're supposed to. Lame bodies leaping for joy! Mute voices singing for joy in the celestial choir! You know, Jesus did healings like this in His ministry.¹ But that was just a foretaste, a sneak preview, of the ultimate

¹ Matthew 11:5

healing that will happen when Jesus raises our bodies from the dead on the day when He returns.

This calls for a celebration! Creation itself will join in the singing: **“The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a crocus.² The land will blossom richly. It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and of Sharon. These will see the glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God.”**

Dear friends, today we’re speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ and about His people - and that’s us. He comes, we come. He comes to save us. We come home to Zion, to the place where God is dwelling with His people forever. So **“be strong, do not be afraid! Look! Your God will come with vengeance, with the retribution of God. He Himself will come and save you!”** He comes. We come. **“Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return. They will enter Zion with singing. Everlasting joy will be on their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”**

What a glorious picture Isaiah has painted for his people and for God’s people of all time. If any of us, like Thomas, must ask, *“Lord, we don’t know where You are going, so how can we know the way?”* Jesus lovingly reminds us as He reminded Thomas, *“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:5-6). We could not step upon the road to God unless God had first come to draw us to Himself. He must come to rescue us. Then we can walk on His way. Without His saving effort, the highway to Zion is only an impossible dream.

So it is that through this prophet Isaiah, we learn that the Messiah would come. Immanuel would come to save His people and would enter the world as a child born of a virgin² - a child called *“Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*³ He would be the Branch that would grow from the stump of Jesse.⁴ Jesus comes, and through this Advent season, we come to meet our Saviour. Amen.

² Isaiah 7:14

³ Isaiah 9:6

⁴ Isaiah 11:1

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

O God, Shepherd of Your people, You have led Your flock in mercy throughout long years of promise. You have sustained them, and given them hope through Your Son Jesus Christ. Give us all steadfast faith in Your mercy, that we may rejoice and give thanks each passing day, and be ready for Jesus' second coming.

In Your presence, we offer You our prayers, petitions, and thanksgiving. Forgive us our sins and wipe out our many transgressions. By Your Holy Spirit renew us with Your gracious gifts.

Open the eyes of those who are spiritually blind. Guide those who are lame and stumbling. Heal those who are diseased in their thoughts, words, and deeds. Lead all people to believe in Him whom You have sent, and to follow the things that are good, true, and lasting, and pleasing to Your Son Jesus Christ.

We pray for Your Church throughout the world. Bless all who preach and teach Your Word, that many more may come to know You as the only true God and Saviour of mankind. Rule over the hearts of all people. Guide the decisions of those in authority, and sit in the councils of the nations, that peace and justice may prevail everywhere.

Bless all who have gathered here today in Your house. Be with those of our congregation who are sick or afflicted in any way in body, mind, or spirit. Grant that in their trials they may learn of Your gracious power, and of Your readiness to help in every time of need.

Pour out Your grace on us all, that we may be enabled each day to show forth the glory of Your name, and to witness to Your saving truth in Jesus Christ our Lord. Give us these things, and whatever else You know we need, in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Article: The Bible is Confirmed as God's Word by Miracles Performed, Prophecy Fulfilled, and Hearts Transformed

God enabled His prophets and apostles to perform miracles. This was to establish the fact that their message had come from God. When Moses stood before Pharaoh of Egypt

and demanded that he let God's people go, Pharaoh responded, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey Him and let Israel go?" (Exodus 5:2). God enabled Moses to summon the ten plagues on Egypt to establish that Moses spoke God's Word. The ten plagues also answered Pharaoh's challenge dramatically. By the time the plagues were over, Pharaoh knew with certainty that the God who had sent Moses is God indeed.

God enabled Elijah (1 Kings 17:22-24) and Elisha (2 Kings 5:14-15) to perform miracles to confirm that they were prophets who spoke the Word of God. Jesus empowered His apostles to perform miracles to substantiate that they were messengers from God (Matt. 10:1). God enabled Paul to perform miracles to indicate that he spoke the Word of God (Acts 19:11-12). In our Gospel today, we heard how John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus to see if He was the promised Messiah. Jesus directed John's disciples to report to him the miracles Jesus was doing. These miracles confirmed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (Matt. 11:2-6) and that God had sent Him (John 10:38).

God did use miracles to corroborate that His messengers proclaimed His Word. These miracles, however, were not the basis for people's faith. The words and promises of God, delivered by the prophets and the apostles, were the basis for people's faith. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees when they demanded a miracle from Him to substantiate that He was the Messiah. In the account of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus indicated that faith is worked only through God's Word, not through miracles (Luke 16:31). When Jesus was taken before King Herod, He did not say anything to him. Herod had hoped to see Jesus perform a miracle to satisfy his curiosity (Luke 23:8-9). Jesus, however, had not come to perform His miracles to entertain people. He came to seek and to save the lost. His miracles certified that He had the divine credentials to accomplish His mission.

It should be noted that miracles were not an automatic guarantee that a messenger came from God. Moses warned, "If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of the prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 13:1-3). The devil tries to deceive people by empowering his agents to perform counterfeit signs and wonders (see also 2 Thess. 2:9). God's people are not to look to miracles alone. They are to look to see if the message is the message of God. The miracles performed by the prophets and the apostles in conjunction with their message corroborated the fact that God had sent them.

Do we need miracles today? God can certainly empower His people to do them, if that is His will. However, He warns us not to base our faith on miracles. Since we have the Bible, we do not have a need for miracles to corroborate its message. We have the complete testimony of the Bible, which, by its own authority, establishes that it is the Word of God.

Children's Message:**A Time for Joy**

Christmas is a time to rejoice. Sometimes, though, we need to be reminded to rejoice.

Do you know why we may need to be reminded to rejoice? Sometimes we need a reminder to rejoice because there are many reasons to be sad - even as we get ready for Christmas. Can you think of any reasons people may be sad at Christmas?



I can think of some reasons. Sometimes people are sad because they're sick, or because they have a family member who's sick. Sometimes people are sad because it's cold outside and they don't have a warm place to sleep. Sometimes people are sad because someone else has been mean to them. Even at Christmas - especially at Christmas - it's easy to be sad. We live in a sinful world where people hurt one another and experience bad things. Maybe you're a little sad today.



But don't stay sad for too long. Rather, rejoice! Rejoice even when some things make you sad, because we know Jesus has come to remove the sadness. This is what we remember at Christmas. Jesus has come to save us from sin and death and everything that makes us sad. He did that by dying on the cross. That was a sad thing, but when Jesus rose again, we saw how it really made things happy! So now Jesus forgives us for the times we've made people sad, and He promises to return and bring happiness and joy! This is what Isaiah wrote about in our First Reading today (Isaiah 35:2). God promises that Jesus will come again and give us joy that will last forever. We rejoice at Christmas that Jesus has come to save us, and we look forward to the day when He returns to make us joyful forever. *Thank You, Jesus, because Your birth has made me joyful! I know that I am Your child, and that You love me and want to be with me forever. Amen.*

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.

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

18 December 4 Advent	24 & 25 December Christmas	1 January 2023
8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG HC	Christmas Eve: 7.30pm OAK HC CHRISTMAS DAY 7.30am LOWOOD HC 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am TMBA HC	8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC 9.00am MARBURG LR
Sunday, 18 December		
READINGS: Isaiah 7:10-17; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25		
HYMNS: 6 28 22 (842 289) 632		
Christmas Services		
READINGS: Christmas Eve: Isaiah 7:10-14; 1 John 4:7-16; Matthew 1:18-25 Christmas Day: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 11:1-8; John 1:1-14		
HYMNS: Christmas Eve: 24 741 634 29 25 629 Christmas Day: 627 33 633 (26 23 part 1 [& 2 if needed]) 34		

CAROLS EVENINGS:

Saturday, 17 December, 7.30pm, Trinity Oakey.

Sunday, 18 December, 7.00pm, Bethlehem Toowoomba.

After the carols (both at Oakey & Toowoomba), a cold/hot drink and biscuit will be available in the hall.

Sunday, 1 January, 1.30pm. Seminary Committee meeting at Bethlehem Toowoomba.

A DVD of the Toowoomba Concert is available now, if you are unable to access the Members section of the AELC website.

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.