

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

HYMNS: 733 1 17 631

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 126

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who were dreaming.

Then our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy. Then people said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD, as you restore streams in the South.

Those who sow in tears will harvest with shouts of joy.

He who continually goes out weeping, carrying his bag of seed, will certainly come back with shouts of joy, carrying his bundles of grain.

COLLECT: Lord, hear our prayers. Graciously come into our hearts, and bring Your light into our darkness. For You live and reign, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READINGS: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 The good news of God's deliverance.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 Readiness for the coming of the Lord.
John 1:6-8, 19-28 He who comes after me is standing among you.

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

¹ "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on Me because the LORD has anointed Me to tell good news to poor people. He has sent Me to bandage up broken-hearted people, to announce freedom to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, ² to announce the year of the favour of the LORD and the day of the vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, ³ to provide for those who grieve in Zion, to give them a splendid head-dress

instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called ‘The Oaks of Righteousness, which the LORD has planted, so that He may get glory for Himself.’”

⁴ They will build up the ancient ruins. They will raise up the former devastated places. They will repair the ruined cities, which have been devastated for many generations...

⁸ “For I, the LORD, love justice. I hate robbery and injustice. I shall faithfully reward their work and I shall make an everlasting Covenant with them.”

⁹ Their offspring will be known among the nations and their descendants among the peoples. All who see them will recognise that they are offspring whom the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰ I rejoice greatly in the LORD. Let my soul shout with joy in my God! For He has clothed me with garments of salvation. He has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness, like a bridegroom who puts on a splendid head-dress, such as a priest wears and **like a bride who decorates** herself with her **jewels**. ¹¹ For, as the ground makes its sprouts come up and, as a garden causes its seedlings to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

¹⁶ Always be joyful! ¹⁷ Pray without ceasing! ¹⁸ Give thanks in everything! For this is what God wants for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹ Do not put out the fire of the Spirit! ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything! Cling to what is good! ²² **Keep away from every form of evil!**

²³ May the God of peace Himself make you completely holy and may your spirit, soul and body, be preserved sound and without blame when our Lord Jesus Christ comes! ²⁴ The One who calls you is faithful, and He will also do it.

John 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶ A man came, whom God sent and whose name was John. ⁷ He came to testify, that is, to testify about the Light so that through Him everyone might believe.

⁸ He was not the Light but came to witness about the Light...

¹⁹ This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to him, to ask him, “Who are you?”

²⁰ He confessed and did not deny. He confessed: “I am not the Christ.”

²¹ They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

He answered, “No.”

²² Then they asked him, “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who have sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

²³ John said: “I am ‘**a voice of one calling out in the wilderness: “Make straight the way of the Lord,”**” as the prophet Isaiah said.”

²⁴ They had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, “Then why are you baptising, if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?”

²⁶ John answered them, “I am baptising with water. There is One standing among you whom you do not know, ²⁷ the One who is coming after me. I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandal.”

²⁸ This happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

GOD’S MESSAGE OF GREATER THINGS TO COME
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday in Advent, 2017
John 1:6-8, 19-28

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 Gospel read before, John 1:6-8, 19-28:

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

Dear friends in Christ,

The Third Sunday in Advent is commonly referred to as “*Rejoice Sunday*,” a reference to the First Reading from Isaiah, who says, “*I rejoice greatly in the LORD. Let my soul shout with joy in my God! For He has clothed me with garments of salvation*” 61:10), and our Second Reading from 1 Thessalonians, which contains the words, “*Always be joyful! Pray without ceasing!*” (5:16-17). On this Third Sunday in Advent, known for its emphasis on rejoicing, our sermon text for this morning tells us of the work and witness of John the Baptist.

In the midst of a people who longed for the glory of their past under rulers like David and Solomon, who resented their present situation of being subdued and ruled by the Romans, and who had grave concerns about their future if things didn’t change, John brings God’s message of greater things to come. His message, as one whom God sent, was a message of hope and a promise of greater things to come in the coming Saviour, which would be cause for great rejoicing.

Since the fall into sin by the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, our relationship with God has been broken. Instead of bearing the holy image of God, our human nature is sinful, and our heart brings forth sin and corruption. Jesus once said, *“what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander,”* (Matthew 15:18-19).

You do not have to look far to see how this has had a growing impact on the apparent downward spiral of things in our world. One only has to read the local newspaper to confirm the dreadful effect of sin in our world. Even when our world and our society want to be at their best, even in this current season when perhaps the emphasis is on peace and goodwill, in reality, the consequences of sin in the lives of people and nations are evident everywhere. It would not be difficult to provide so many examples that could fill the whole service time this morning, and still, we would only scratch the surface. I would also not be telling you anything you don't already know.

Rather than spending all that time speaking of sin in past and current affairs, let's talk about sin in your life. Now that is uncomfortable! Its effects may be manifested in ill health, loneliness, broken relationships, suffering, or some kind of personal loss. We all experience these things. They may be the result of our own sin or the sin of others, or simply the result of life in a sinful and dying world. And on the basis of this broken relationship with God, whether we look at the past, present, or future, there isn't much for which to rejoice. It was that way two thousand years ago, and it's true also today. Is that all there is? Why doesn't God do something about this?

He has. **“A man came, whom God sent, and whose name was John.”** With those words, we see that God has done something. Actually, you can read about several “sent” individuals in the New Testament. The angel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin Mary to announce that she would give birth to Jesus;¹ Jesus sent out the twelve disciples to announce that the kingdom of God was near;² the Apostle Paul tells us that he was sent to preach the Gospel;³ and God sends His angel to the Apostle John to communicate the revelation of Jesus Christ.⁴

God sent John the Baptist. Like so many others, John was sent with divine authority on a divine mission. As you read through the Old Testament, you will

¹ Luke 1:19, 26

² Matthew 10:5-7

³ 1 Corinthians 1:17

⁴ Revelation 1:1

see the record of God at work to do something about our human condition. He made a promise to Adam and Eve and to future generations that He would send a Saviour to atone for sin and to rescue us from the power of sin, death, and the devil. Even when the Israelites, the people He chose, were unfaithful to Him, He remained faithful to His promises. He called patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to carry the promise from one generation to another. He sent prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah to prepare people for the coming of the Saviour. At times, He gave very specific information through these prophets about the Saviour to come. He promised and He called, and He sent so that even in the worst of times and situations, people could see that God was at work, and, as a result of His evident work, they could rejoice that there were greater things to come.

John was sent to “**witness about the Light**.” His message was clear: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2). He baptised people in the Jordan River - a baptism of repentance. Judging by the crowds that came to be baptised by him, there was a “buzz” about him and his message. Yet perhaps for some, it was curiosity because he certainly did appear as a curious figure. He was clothed in camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.⁵ Whether the people were merely curious or had a heartfelt desire to hear His message - His call to repentance - and to be baptised by Him, the Scriptures tell us that “*all the land of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem kept coming out to him. They were baptised by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins*” (Mark 1:5).

The religious leaders, the Pharisees, “**sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to him, to ask him, “Who are you?”** Was he the Christ? Was he Elijah? Was he the Prophet, the one like Moses whom God had promised to the children of Israel in the wilderness that he would raise up?⁶ Who was this man who was drawing so much attention? Was he someone who, perhaps, would rally the Jews to overthrow their Roman rulers?

John was not some slick TV evangelist. He was not some polished political activist rallying followers around him for some revolutionary cause to overthrow the government. In fact, everything he did and said was not about him. His message was not to draw attention to himself, but rather to Jesus. Later on, referring to Jesus, John the Baptist said to his own disciples, “*He must increase,*

⁵ Mark 1:6

⁶ Deuteronomy 18:15

but I must decrease” (John 3:30). In our text, he tells those who are questioning him, **“I am ‘a voice of one calling out in the wilderness: “Make straight the way of the Lord.””** John was sent by God on a divine mission as the forerunner of greater things to come.

John had no purpose beyond bringing a message, being a voice. He was carrying on a ministry for another, for the Lord, gathering audiences in the wilderness near the Jordan River. He was crying out his message to a world that spiritually had become a wilderness made barren by sin and unbelief. In fact, that was the reason he was chosen and sent by God. He was to point people to the One God had sent to be our Saviour. So, one verse following our sermon text, he points to Jesus and identifies Him as *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”* (v 29).

When you look at John the Baptist, you can’t help but see greater things yet to come because John points you to Jesus, and when you look at Jesus, you see the true Light of the world!

Each of the four Gospels has an account of John’s ministry and message. In essence, it is a prologue or a foreword to what follows: the account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the subsequent proclamation of Jesus as the Saviour of the world. He is the one God promised to send to redeem fallen mankind. Clearly, in Jesus, God was at work and has done something about our sinful condition.

However, in the Gospels, we read of resistance and opposition to Jesus because He didn’t meet the mistaken expectations of people. Those who were politically minded wanted a revolutionary leader to overthrow the Romans. Instead, He tells them, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36). Many of those who had witnessed the miraculous feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand wanted Him as their “bread king.” Instead, He tells them, *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me will not hunger, and whoever believes in Me will never thirst”* (John 6:35).

Even in our day, people have mistaken expectations regarding Jesus. Some see Jesus as simply an eloquent voice for a better society. Some also see Him as completely irrelevant and want nothing to do with Him. None of these human expectations has ever come to grips with the most basic problem of all - that *because of the sin we inherited and the sin we commit, we are broken and dying people in a broken and dying world.*

When, in faith, we look at the One to whom John testified as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, we can look forward to greater things to

come. That which has separated us from God, that which so often brings hurt and pain to human relationships, is forgiven because the Lamb of God, His own Son, took our sinful nature along with all our sins to the cross. There He put them to death by His own suffering and death. John's Baptism was one of repentance. But there were greater things to come. In our Baptism, we were baptised into Christ's death so that just as He was raised from the dead, we have been raised to a newness of life.⁷

How would you summarise your life today? Are you stuck in the fatalistic philosophy of "it is what it is"? Have you lost sight of the wonder of forgiveness, life, and salvation - the greater things we have in our crucified and risen Saviour? Have you forgotten those wonderful promises that, through Christ, God causes "*all things [to] work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose*" (Romans 8:28)? Do you look to the future with fear in your heart because of the uncertainties of life and in the world? Do you dread that time when your earthly life will come to an end, and you will stand face-to-face before a holy and righteous God?

Let me share with you greater things. To those haunted and bothered by sin, guilt, and shame, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8:1). For those who face uncertain times, illness, or even imminent death, God promises "*I shall never leave you or forsake you*" (Hebrews 13:5). In Christ, we have a genuine reason to rejoice **always**.

John the Baptist, as the forerunner of Christ, proclaimed a message of repentance and urged the people to prepare for the imminent coming of the promised Saviour. No matter what people were going through or what they had to endure, there was a sense that greater things would come because the promise of the Messiah was about to be fulfilled.

So it is with us today as He comes to us in Word and Sacrament, and we eagerly await His Second Coming.

Today, as we rejoice at what God has done and at the greater things to come, listen again to these words taken from our Second Reading: "*May the God of peace Himself make you completely holy, and may your spirit, soul and body, be preserved sound and without blame when our Lord Jesus Christ comes! The One who calls you is faithful, and He will also do it*" (1 Thess. 5:23-24). Amen.

⁷ Romans 6:4

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: We are not Dreaming!

“When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion, we were like those who were dreaming,” David writes (Psalm 126:1). The nightmare of exile is over, and the sudden rush of joy is like a barren desert turning into a flood. Imagine the flow of life-giving water or the flow of wine into the cups of joy-filled guests at the best of banquet celebrations, bringing happiness to the heart as people celebrate freedom!

Captives who have been set free cannot do anything but rejoice and be glad; every breath of free air is a celebration. The return from Babylon meant so much to Judah. The former captives are set free to build their own homes wherever they wanted. They could work their own ground and farms and not be forced to hand any of their crops over to Babylonian taskmasters. They were set free to worship the LORD God, no longer being forced to bow down and honour the false gods Ishtar, Marduk, or any other idol ever again. They were free to worship the One who created, redeemed, and called them by name. Isaiah 43:1: *“Now, however, this is what the LORD has said, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: “Do not be afraid! For I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are Mine.”* Those who returned were like those who had just awakened from a nightmare and jumped into a river of gladness.

From what nightmare do you need to wake up? We all have them, you know. I know that everyone is supposed to be happy this time of year, but maybe you aren't. Maybe life during these joyful, festive days is too much. The nightmare of debt, addiction, or abuse has led to the destruction of hope, and suddenly, you feel like a captive. Exiled in the Babylon of your own sins and forced to bow down to some rather worthless idols. Power, money, sex - name your poison - we've all been there. You know what it's like to wake up in the morning with regret, sorrow, shame, hurt, and hopelessness.

Whatever it is, your own sins or the impact of someone else's sin against you, it has you shackled like a slave. It's just as Jesus says in John 8:34: *“Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”* Sin, Satan, and death have us lock, stock, and barrel. Chained up and ready to march us off into that eternal Babylon we call hell.

But just when you think all is lost, a voice is heard. A voice calls you out of death and the valley of the shadow. Calling to you like a voice in the

wilderness, there come words of promise and deliverance. Listen to Jesus speak in Luke 4: *“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me because He has anointed Me to tell the Good News to poor people. He has sent Me to announce freedom to prisoners and restoration of sight to blind people, to set free those who have been oppressed, and to announce the acceptable year of the Lord”* (18-19). This Scripture, Jesus says, has been fulfilled in your hearing. The Spirit was, is, and forever shall be upon the incarnate Son, who was born for us to set us free from the nightmares that haunt our lives.

But after dealing with so much sin and temptation and all the weakness of life, how can such promises possibly be true? Freedom, liberty, sight, good news for the poor, and the year of the Lord’s favour for everyone. Is it possible? Could it really be true? Could it be that the promises are for me?

Good news! This is for you indeed. The Word of God that called in Isaiah is now incarnate in Jesus Christ. The Word has been made flesh, and He has so much to say and give to you, me, and the world. Your idols have been broken. Your sins are forgiven. Your death has been undone because the Baby in the manger has grown up, died, and risen again. No longer are you compelled to live in a prison of your own making. You are brought back home by the grace of God given to you by faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Home. Back to the altar and the font of your Baptism. Brought back to the very Word of God made flesh. Given new life - redeemed and renewed. Yes, you can start all over again.

The nightmare is over. You are not dreaming! This is far better than any dream we could ever have. A new reality is yours in Christ our Lord. A blood-bought and baptismal-water-covered reality. You have been brought back to God, back to your Creator. Returned to the Father who loves you more than we could ever ask or imagine. Exile broken. Death defeated. Freedom granted. The Baby in the manger who grows to be the man on the cross - everything is His gift. We have returned from a nightmare to a new reality in Christ.

How do we declare our advent hope? The resounding words of our Introit for today, Psalm 126!

Children's Message:

Look at our picture. What do you think it is showing? It has an arrow pointing in the direction of where to park. That's what arrows are good for. They point us in the right direction.



In our Gospel today, we hear about John the Baptist acting kind of like an arrow - pointing at Jesus so that all people might believe that He was their Saviour. The people were wondering if maybe John was the Saviour they'd been waiting for, and they asked him, "Who are you?" But John didn't point at himself. No way! Not me, said John. "I am not the Christ." So they asked him again, saying, "Who are you, that we may give an answer?" And even then, John still pointed the people toward Jesus and told them to prepare for their Saviour's coming. Did you hear what he said? "Make straight the way of the Lord," John said. There's Someone coming, John told them, who's greater than I am. "I am not even worthy of Him," said John. John knew the time was coming soon for Jesus to be revealed as God's Son who would die for our sins, and John wanted to help the people get ready for their Saviour by pointing like a straight arrow to Him.

We know that God has already come for you and me. He's made us His children in Baptism and given us faith in Jesus, our Saviour. When we hear about John pointing to Jesus like a straight arrow, we can think of ways to point to Jesus too! Who brings us real joy at Christmas? Jesus! Like a straight arrow, we point to Jesus on the cross. Who gives us a church family to encourage us to keep growing in faith? Jesus! Like a straight arrow, we can point to all those who come to church to worship Jesus with us. Who can bring comfort to a friend who's feeling sad, or sick, or lonely? Jesus! Like a straight arrow, we can point to each other. What a wonderful thing you get to do as God's beloved children - point like arrows to Jesus! *Thank You, Jesus, for sending John to point us to You, our Saviour. Amen.*

Welcome to all worshipping with us!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

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

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

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

24 December 4 Advent	25 December (Monday) Christmas	31 December
9.30am OAK HC and Children's Christmas Program 9.00am LOWOOD LR	7.30am LOWOOD HC 8.30am OAK LR <u>8.30am</u> TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 10.30am AUB HC	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG HC
Sunday, 24 December		
READINGS: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38		
HYMNS: (Lowood) 622 2 142 24		
Sunday, 25 December		
READINGS: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-12; John 1:1-14		
HYMNS: 627 630 632 (34 629) 26		

Tonight, 7.30pm. Carols Evening at Oakey. A shared supper will be held after the carols. Please bring a plate.

Saturday, December 23, 9.00am at Trinity Oakey. Practice run-through of the Downs children's Christmas program.

Please take home with you today the service times calendar for the next 12 months, and also a copy of Pastor's Christmas letter.

FORWARD ANNOUNCEMENT:

January 7, 2024. Trinity Oakey will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of their church building. The congregation wishes to hold a Praise and Thanksgiving service and would like to invite *all members of the parish to attend*. The service will be a 10.00am HC service, followed by a shared lunch.