

Rejoice



**Mid-Week Advent Service
2025**

Stand

P O Lord, open my lips,
C and my mouth will declare Your praise.

P Make haste, O God, to deliver me;
C make haste to help me, O Lord.

C Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P Praise to You, O Christ, King who comes to save us.

Psalm

Psalm 27:1-6

¹ **The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?**

² **When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.**

³ **Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.**

⁴ **One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in His temple.**

⁵ **For He will hide me in His shelter
in the day of trouble;
He will conceal me under the cover of His tent;
He will lift me high upon a rock.**

6 **And now my head shall be lifted up
 above my enemies all around me,
 and I will offer in His tent
 sacrifices with shouts of joy;
 I will sing and make melody to the LORD.**

Sit

362 O Sing of Christ



1 O sing of Christ, whose birth made known The kind-ness of the Lord,
 2 What Ad-am lost, none could re - claim, And Par - a - dise was barred
 3 He came to that which was His own, But He was not re - ceived;
 4 Lord Je - sus Christ, You deigned to dwell A - mong us here on earth



E - ter - nal Word made flesh and bone So we could be re - stored.
 Un - til the sec - ond Ad - am came To mend what sin had marred.
 Yet still through Him God's glo - ry shone, And some His name be - lieved.
 As God with us, Em - man - u - el, To bring this ho - ly birth.



Up - on our frail hu - man - i - ty God's fin - ger chose to trace
 For when the time was full and right God sent His on - ly Son;
 To these He gave the right to be The heirs of heav'n a - bove,
 Though rich, You will - ing - ly be - came One with our pov - er - ty,



The full-ness of His de - i - ty, The i - con of His grace.
 He came to us as life and light And our re - demp-tion won.
 Born not of hu - man an - ces - try But born of God in love.
 That we might share Your wealth and name For all e - ter - ni - ty!

Text: Stephen P. Starke, 1955

Tune: English; adapt. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872–1958

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Readings

Malachi 4:1-6

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

⁴“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

⁵“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

P O Lord, have mercy on us.

C Thanks be to God.

1 Peter 2:9-12

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹²Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

P O Lord, have mercy on us.

C Thanks be to God.

Stand

Luke 1:57-80

⁵⁷Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸And her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they

rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” ⁶¹ And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbours. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Responsory (Advent)

- P** Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch.
- C** **This is the name by which He will be called: The Lord Is Our Righteousness.**
- P** In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.
- C** **This is the name by which He will be called: The Lord Is Our Righteousness.**
- P** Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
- C** **This is the name by which He will be called: The Lord Is Our Righteousness.**



The Song of Mary (*remain standing*)

933 My Soul Rejoices



1 My soul re - joic - es, My spir - it voic - es— Sing the
2 His arm now bar - ing, His strength de - clar - ing— Sing the



great - ness of the Lord! For God my Sav - ior Has shown me
great - ness of the Lord! The proud He scat - ters, Their rule He



fa - vor— Sing the great - ness of the Lord! With praise and
shat - ters— Sing the great - ness of the Lord! Op - pres - sion



bless - ing, Join in con - fess - ing God, who is sole - ly Might - y and
halt - ed; The meek ex - alt - ed. Full are the hun - gry; Emp - ty, the



ho - ly— O sing the great - ness of God the Lord! His mer - cy
wealth - y— O sing the great - ness of God the Lord! Here is the



sure - ly Shall rest se - cure - ly On all who fear Him,
to - ken All that was spo - ken To A - br'ham's off - spring



Love and re - vere Him— O sing the great - ness of God the Lord!
God is ful - fill - ing— O sing the great - ness of God the Lord!

Text: Stephen P. Starke, 1955

Tune: Giovanni Giacomo Gastoldi, c. 1556–c. 1622

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Sermon (*Remain standing as the Sermon is announced, then sit*)

GOD'S GRACIOUS VISITATION

Dear friends in Christ,

John was not just another prophet; he was the one prophet in whom all the previous ones were gathered. John put in place the form of baptism so that, at the font, we pass with Moses through the Red Sea, out of slavery to sin, and follow Joshua through the Jordan, with the mark of the triune God on our foreheads. At His baptism by John, Jesus was designated by the voice from heaven as the beloved Son who took the place of Isaac as the sacrifice for sins. By John baptising Jesus, the entire Old Testament was coming to life.

Christianity is not just a matter of words. It's a matter of things happening. When the imprisoned John sent a message to Jesus asking whether He was really the Christ, He answered, "*Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them*" (Luke 7:22). God's words are punctuated by events that really happen and things that really exist. They are not promises suspended in midair; they are things we can touch with our hands. That's what the other John, the apostle John, once said, "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands...*" (1 John 1:1).

For not believing that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son in her old age, Zechariah was given a sign of God's displeasure. The father of the one whom Isaiah said would be the voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord¹ lost his voice for not believing what God said. As the neighbours gossiped about the kind of son Elizabeth would have, the father who had the answer could not say a word. His tied tongue was a sign to him of his unbelief and a sign to us that he was a prophet. When God untied his tongue, Zechariah ushered in the New Testament era with what is known as the *Benedictus*, announcing that everything that God had promised through the prophets since the beginning of the world was about to happen.

From childhood, John knew that his father's tied tongue was a sign of his father's unbelief, but it was also a sign to John that his father was a prophet. His father's unbelief was a replay of Sarah's unbelief when she laughed at the thought that, despite her old age, she would have a son.² Every time she called her son by name, Isaac, which means "laughter," she was reminded of her unbelief. And, as always, *God has the last laugh in*

¹ John 1:23

² Genesis 18:12

doing things we do not expect.

Devotions in Zechariah and Elizabeth's home likely involved singing the Benedictus, a psalm focused on God and John's mission. It encapsulates theology in poetic form. **“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David.”**

The key words are visit, redeem, and horn of salvation. In this context, visit does not mean a casual trip; God visits His people with *the purpose of redeeming them by offering Himself as the price for sins.*

Let's put this in dogmatic terms: without incarnation, there is no atonement; without atonement, there is no justification. The prophets have preached all of this since the beginning of the world. The God of Israel works salvation not just by speaking a word of forgiveness but by offering Himself as the sacrifice. The God of Israel is Immanuel, God with us, and after His resurrection, He reaffirmed this when He said, *“Behold, I am with you always, to end of the age”* (cf Matt. 28:20). He told us this would happen when we share the Sacrament with Him: *“I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom”* (Matt. 26:29). By Jesus' resurrection, the Father's kingdom that John announced was established. Here in the church, Jesus is present so that the blood He poured out to God as a sacrifice becomes a sacrament to us.

As you sing the Benedictus, you will find a summary of our faith. The Benedictus would also make a good Christmas card: **“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, . . . the oath that He swore to our father Abraham.”** It carries more weight than simply saying, “Merry Christmas.”

Dear friends, John the Baptist ended his ministry by having his head severed from his body. His crime was sermons that were not politically but rather theologically correct. Did you ever think of what happened to his father, Zechariah? After all, it was the father, not his son, who gave us the Benedictus. It would not be inappropriate if Zechariah preceded his son and followed his Old Testament namesake as Jesus described in these words: *“On you [brood of vipers] may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar”* (Matt. 23:35).

In John the Baptist, the Messianic age had come, and it comes with the martyrdom of its preachers. All for what? Simply proclaiming the Good News that the Saviour had visited the world to be its Redeemer. As we prepare for the season of Christmas, we keep in mind that the Lord is coming again—not as a lowly Baby in a manger, but as Almighty God to judge the world and bring us salvation. Even so, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

354 Arise, O Christian People



1 A - rise, O Chris - tian peo - ple! Pre - pare your - selves to -
 2 Pre - pare the way be - fore Him; Pre - pare for Him the
 3 The hum - ble heart and low - ly God rais - es up on
 4 Pre - pare my heart, Lord Je - sus; Turn not from me a -



day; Pre - pare to greet the Sav - ior, Who takes your
 best. Cast out what would of - fend Him, This great, this
 high; Be - neath His feet in ter - ror The haugh - ty
 side, And help me to re - ceive You This bless - ed



sins a - way. To us by grace a - lone The
 heav'n - ly guest. Make straight, make plain the way; The
 soul shall lie. The heart sin - cere and right, That
 Ad - vent - tide. From stall and man - ger low Come



truth and light were giv - en; The prom - ised Lord from
 low - ly val - leys rais - ing, The heights of pride a -
 heeds God's in - vi - ta - tion And makes true prep - a -
 now to dwell with - in me; I'll sing Your prais - es



heav - en To all the world is shown.
 bas - ing, His path all e - ven lay.
 ra - tion— It is the Lord's de - light.
 glad - ly And forth Your glo - ry show.

Text: Valentin Thilo, 1607–62; tr. Arthur T. Russell, 1806–74, alt.
 Tune: New Catechismus Gesangbüchlein, 1598, Hamburg, alt.
 Text and tune: Public domain

Stand

Canticle

- P** Let my prayer rise before You as incense,
C and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Prayer

P O Lord, support us all the day long of this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, Lord, in Your mercy grant us a safe lodging and a holy rest and peace at the last, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C Amen.

Lord's Prayer

C 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
forever and ever. Amen.

Benedicamus

P Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Benediction

P The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C Amen.

Sit

613 To Thee, Omniscient Lord of All



1 To Thee, om - ni - scient Lord of all, In grief and shame I
2 O Lord, my God, to Thee I pray: O cast me not in
3 O Je - sus, let Thy pre - cious blood Be to my soul a



hum - bly call; I see my sins a - gainst Thee, Lord,
wrath a - way! Let Thy good Spir - it ne'er de - part,
cleans - ing flood. Turn not, O Lord, Thy guest a - way,



The sins of thought and deed and word. They press me
But let Him draw to Thee my heart That tru - ly
But grant that jus - ti - fied I may Go to my



sore; I cry to Thee: O God, be mer - ci - ful to me!
pen - i - tent I be: O God, be mer - ci - ful to me!
house at peace with Thee: O God, be mer - ci - ful to me!

Text: Magnus Brostrup Landstad, 1802–80; tr. Carl Döving, 1867–1937, alt.
Tune: attr. Martin Luther, 1483–1546
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Acknowledgments

Vespers from Lutheran Service Book

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