

**Welcome to Worship together while apart!**



We begin today with the lighting of the Third Advent Candle...the candle of Joy. First we light Candle One...the candle of Hope, and candle Two...the candle of Peace.

Then say:

Come let us walk in the Light of the Lord. Jesus Christ is the Light of the World, a Light no darkness can extinguish.

( Light the Third Candle)

The Third candle on the Advent Wreath invites us to live with great joy in our hearts. We need look for no other. Jesus is the Christ. The redeemed of the Lord will come to Zion with singing and everlasting joy! Sorrow and sighing shall pass away! Our God makes streams to flow in every desert! He helps the poor, cares for the orphans, heals the body and the soul. He brings justice to the oppressed and sets the captives free. The waters of salvation overflow in our hearts. We need look for no other. In Jesus, our joy is complete!

**Sentence:** The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted. ( Isaiah 61:1)

**Collect:** God of power and mercy, you call us once again to celebrate the coming of your Son. Remove those things which hinder love of you, that when he comes, he may find us waiting in awe and wonder for him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy spirit one God, now and for ever, Amen,

**Readings:** Isaiah 61: 1-4,8-11    Canticle 18 the Song of Mary    1  
Thessalonians 5: 16-24  
Canticle 18 from the BAS is:

**My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; \* for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: \* the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. He has mercy on those who fear him \* in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, \* he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, \* and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, \* and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel, \* for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, \* to Abraham and his children for ever. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: \* as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.**

**The Holy Gospel: John 1: 6-8 , 16-28**

**<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.**

**<sup>19</sup> This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” <sup>20</sup> He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.”<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>21</sup> And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” <sup>22</sup> Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” <sup>23</sup> He said,**

**“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,  
‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”**

**as the prophet Isaiah said.**

**<sup>24</sup> Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup> They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah,<sup>[b]</sup> nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” <sup>26</sup> John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup> the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” <sup>28</sup> This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing**

### **Sermon:**

How many times have you heard the word “witness” and wondered what it was all about. Perhaps you’ve seen street preachers giving a “word”, or people.. usually in other churches...rising to their feet to share what God is doing in their lives...or heard about people who are comfortable or not comfortable with witnessing about their faith in Jesus. Isaiah, Paul and John the Baptist were all witnesses. Their example can tell us much about what being a witness may mean for us.

We begin with Isaiah. Isaiah was a learned man, but a simple family man with a wife and at least one son. He was a devout Jew who lived in Jerusalem and had quite a normal life. One day, when he was in the temple

in about the year 730 BC, he had an astonishing vision that changed his life. He saw God, high and holy and lifted up, and he saw himself as a sinful man, who couldn't stand before God. And in his vision, an angel brought a burning coal to touch his lips, to purify his life, and he fell to his knees to commit his life to God in a whole new way. God sent him out to preach and prophecy and he did so faithfully, with passion and clarity for a period of at least forty-eight years. He became a witness to the Light that God was pouring into the world. First to the light which had entered his own mind and heart when he came to see for the first time who God really was...holy, powerful and merciful...a God to be served, not ignored. A God to be loved and honoured as well as obeyed. He called upon his nation to turn back to God, to stop worrying about the terrors of the Assyrian army and trust in the God of Abraham, and Isaac and Moses. He surely preached repentance. He surely preached holy living. But most of all, he preached the truth that God would deliver his people. Isaiah wrote the beautiful words which Jesus chose as the Charter for His own ministry. **The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...to preach good news to the poor, to announce deliverance for the captives, healing for the sick, to comfort all who mourn, to give a garment of praise in the place of despair, to grow righteousness as a living tree with good and holy fruit.** Isaiah was a witness to the light when he had received from God. He spoke of what he knew. And he did so with passion.

John the Baptist was also a witness to the Light. When questioned as to who he was, John did not get shifty. He said flat out "I am not the Messiah. I am one who God has called to prepare the way for the Messiah, who is greater than I". John simply told the truth. He did not put on airs, capitalize on his popularity with the common people, or boast that he stood

in the place of God. He just told what he knew, simply and honestly. He knew his answer would offend the Pharisees, who wanted him to be at least a new prophet like Elijah. But he didn't care about offending anyone, except the one who would come after him. The One who would be the true Light for the whole world. That One, he would not offend. That One, he would honour. In everything that John the Baptist said and did, he constantly pointed to Jesus, the Light of the world.

If only the church could do the same. If only as Christians we could do the same. So often, the church or religious society or individual priests and pastors have tried to "be" God. Even issued statements and interpretations which purported to be the one and only real, authentic Word or Will of God. Sometimes, we forget that we are not called to be the Light, but rather called to point to the Light.

Paul points constantly to Christ. He encourages the Thessalonians to live good lives, to be thankful, to pray continually, to be wise and discerning, to love and serve each other. Yet he also is sure to tell them that they can't do those things just through their own efforts. It is God who has called them, God who has sent Light into their lives, and it is God who will complete them, it is God who has the power, and glory, and unending love.

John and Paul and Isaiah all did some things in common. They all spent time setting **the record straight** – telling the truth-; they all did so both with their mouths and with their lives – **authentically believing and acting out the truth** which they spoke, and they all did so **with great humility** – always pointing people beyond their own words or actions to God Himself. They didn't play games, and they didn't pretend to be more than they were.

The handsome actor Robert Redford was in an elevator in a hotel. A young woman got on at one of the floors and just stared disbelievingly at him. “Are you the real Robert Redford?”, she asked. And he replied “Only when I am alone”. This actor had learned some wisdom. He knew that the publicity, and fame, and external picture that people held about him were not really who he was. And he was comfortable with the person he knew himself to be when no one else was looking!

How would we respond to questions like these? Who are you? Are you really a Christian? Why do you do what you do? If we can say honestly and with humility that we are just people who point to the Light which came into the world in Christ, then we are being like John, and Isaiah, and Paul. If we can say with humility that we aren’t the last word in faith, we aren’t the greatest example of love, but we’re trying to be faithful, then we are like them too. If we can say that it is not so important who we are, but “whose” we are, then our focus has moved off of ourselves and onto Christ.

We can say all of those things without getting all puffed up with flowery words, without having to establish power or authority. We can say them simply, and honestly. And we are called to do so. Every one of us. To bear witness to the Light of the World.

**As we live in the Spirit of Advent, we wait with joyful expectation for the Light of Christ.** The Light which moved Isaiah, delivered Paul, and propelled John the Baptist into the desert. We wait for the Light of Christ which will one day transform our world through His coming again.

Let us wait honestly, humbly, and hopefully...sure of “whose” we are, and becoming more and more every day who God has always intended us to

be. Children of the Light, bringing the Light of Christ to all who live in darkness. Amen.

**Prayer for Advent Three:**

O God, your will is justice for the poor and peace for the afflicted. May the news of the dawn of your coming bring healing to our hearts and may your promise of salvation fill us with joy and hope. May we, by word and deed, share our joy with all who dwell in sadness and all who long for Light. Amen.

**Blessing:**

May the joy of the Lord be your strength, and the Light of the Lord be your guide, and the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you always. Amen.

