



# Celebrate

Third Sunday of Advent  
December 14, 2025

*A note of joyful expectation marks today's worship. Isaiah announces that the desert shall rejoice and blossom, and Jesus points to the unexpected and transforming signs of God's reign. We wait with patience for the coming of the Lord, even as we rejoice at his presence among us this day: in word and holy supper, in church and in our homes, in silent reflection and in works of justice and love. We pray that God would open our eyes and ears to the wonders of Christ's advent among us.*

## Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of all who look to you, Lord God, and strengthen our faith in your coming, that, transformed by grace, we may walk in your way; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## First Reading

Isaiah 35:1-10

*The prophet describes the return from the Babylonian captivity as a joyous procession to Zion. God's coming reign will bring a renewal of creation in which health and wholeness will be restored. There is no need for fear, for God is coming to save.*

The wilderness and the dry land shall  
be glad;

the desert shall rejoice and  
blossom;

like the crocus <sup>2</sup>it shall blossom  
abundantly

and rejoice with joy and shouting.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given  
to it,

the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,  
the majesty of our God.

<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands  
and make firm the feeble knees.

<sup>4</sup>Say to those who are of a fearful  
heart,

"Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,  
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you."

<sup>5</sup>Then the eyes of the blind shall be  
opened,

and the ears of the deaf shall be  
opened;

<sup>6</sup>then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless  
sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the  
wilderness

and streams in the desert;

<sup>7</sup>the burning sand shall become a pool  
and the thirsty ground springs of  
water;

the haunt of jackals shall become a  
swamp;

the grass shall become reeds and  
rushes.

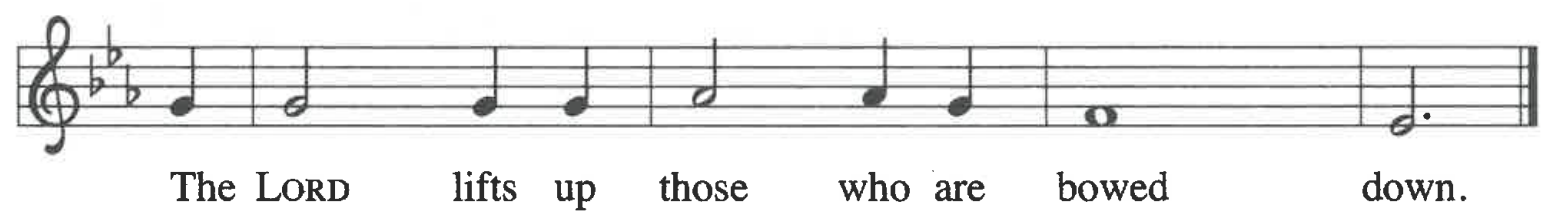
<sup>8</sup>A highway shall be there,

and it shall be called the Holy Way;

the unclean shall not travel on it,

but it shall be for God's people;

*continued*



Happy are they who have the God of Jacob <sup>1</sup> for their help,  
whose hope is in the <sup>1</sup> LORD their God;  
<sup>6</sup>**who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that <sup>1</sup> is in them;**  
**who keeps promis- <sup>1</sup> es forever;**  
<sup>7</sup>who gives justice to those who are oppressed,  
and food to <sup>1</sup> those who hunger.  
The LORD sets the <sup>1</sup> captive free.  
<sup>8</sup>**The LORD opens the eyes of the blind;**  
**the LORD lifts up those who <sup>1</sup> are bowed down;**  
**the LORD <sup>1</sup> loves the righteous. R**  
<sup>9</sup>The LORD cares <sup>1</sup> for the stranger;  
the LORD sustains the orphan and widow,  
but frustrates the way <sup>1</sup> of the wicked.  
<sup>10</sup>**The LORD shall <sup>1</sup> reign forever,**  
**your God, O Zion, throughout**  
**all generations. <sup>1</sup> Hallelujah! R**

*or Luke 1:46b-55; refrain, Luke 1:47 [not printed]*

no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

<sup>9</sup>No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there,  
but the redeemed shall walk there.

<sup>10</sup>And the ransomed of the LORD  
shall return  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

## Second Reading

James 5:7-10

*In anticipation of the Lord's coming, Christians are called upon to cultivate patience rather than discontent.*

Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup>You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. <sup>9</sup>Brothers

and sisters, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! <sup>10</sup>As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

## Gospel

Matthew 11:2-11

*John the Baptist expects the Messiah to bring God's judgment upon the earth (Matt. 3:11-12). From a prison cell, he wonders whether Jesus is the one who will do this. Jesus' response indicates that God's reign is indeed being fulfilled already through healing and restoration.*

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

<sup>7</sup>As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the

wind? <sup>8</sup>What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.'

<sup>11</sup>"Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

# Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

In our waiting and watching, we come to you in prayer, O God, trusting your promise to renew the church, the nations, and the whole creation.

A brief silence.

God of power and mercy, we praise you for Jesus and his acts of healing and liberation. Lead us to proclaim the good news from generation to generation, that all may place their hope in you. God of grace,  
**hear our prayer.**

When lands are parched and dry, bring rain and snow; where wilderness is barren, sow seeds of life. Fill the lands with trees that grow, plants that flower, and creatures that thrive, as nature proclaims the wonder of your works. God of grace,  
**hear our prayer.**

When there is injustice or corruption among nations and leaders, root it out. Turn their attention to inequity and the cries of the poor. Instill a deeper sense of compassion and care in all who govern. God of grace,  
**hear our prayer.**

When bodies weaken and hearts grow fearful, speak your blessing. (*We pray especially for . . .*) In uncertain times, remind us of the promise spoken to our ancestors in faith. God of grace,  
**hear our prayer.**

When people are imprisoned or held captive, break the chains and offer release. Strengthen the work of the church in restorative justice, breaking cycles of poverty, and welcoming the immigrant (*especially we pray for Global Refuge and Lutheran Social Services*). God of grace,  
**hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

As we await your coming, we give thanks for the faithful who have lived and died in faith (*especially Mary, mother of Jesus, John of the Cross and . . .*). May their boldness of faith inspire our witness and work. God of grace,  
**hear our prayer.**

Draw near to us, O God, as we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ, Emmanuel.  
**Amen.**

## Preparing for Next Week

**Monday** Psalm 42. **Tuesday** Jude 17-25. **Wednesday** Zechariah 8:1-17. **Thursday** Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19. **Friday** 2 Samuel 7:18-22. **Saturday** (commemoration of Katharina von Bora Luther, renewer of the church, died 1552) John 3:31-36. **Fourth Sunday of Advent** Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25.

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