

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT
NOVEMBER 29, 2020

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *O Savior, Rend the Heavens Wide* Setting: Jonathan R. Mueller

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #355 *O Savior, Rend the Heavens Wide*



1 O Sav - ior, rend the heav - ens wide;
2 O Fa - ther, light from heav - en send;
3 O earth, in flow'r - ing bud be seen;
4 O Fount of hope, how long, how long?



Come down, come down with might - y stride;
As morn - ing dew, O Son, de - scend.
Clothe hill and dale in garb of green.
When will You come with com - fort strong?



Un - lock the gates, the doors break down;
Drop down, you clouds, the life of spring:
Bring forth, O earth, a blos - som rare,
O come, O come, Your throne fore - go;



Un - bar the way to heav - en's crown.
To Ja - cob's line rain down the King.
Our Sav - ior, sprung from mead - ow fair.
Con - sole us in our vale of woe.

5 O Morning Star, O radiant Sun,
When will our hearts behold Your dawn?
O Sun, arise; without Your light
We grope in gloom and dark of night.

6 Sin's dreadful doom upon us lies;
Grim death looms fierce before our eyes.
O come, lead us with mighty hand
From exile to our promised land.

7 There shall we all our praises bring
And sing to You, our Savior King;
There shall we laud You and adore
Forever and forevermore.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid:

cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You, and worthily magnify Your Holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sin, be our advocate in heaven and bring us to eternal life. Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

(Silence is kept)

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,

we confess that we have sinned against You and against our neighbor in thought, word and deed; through negligence, through weakness and through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve You in newness of life, to the glory of Your Name. Amen.

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

KYRIE

Kyrie, Kyrie eleison. Kyrie, Kyrie eleison.

For peace in our hearts as we gather for worship, and for the peace of the whole world and the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord

Kyrie, Kyrie eleison. Kyrie, Kyrie eleison.

For the proclamation of the Gospel in this and every place, and for the calling of all to faith, let us pray to the Lord.

Kyrie, Kyrie eleison. Kyrie, Kyrie eleison.

For grace to await our Lord's coming again in glory, and for the joyful anticipation of his coming into our hearts today, let us pray to the Lord

Kyrie, Kyrie eleison. Kyrie, Kyrie eleison.

HYMN OF PRAISE (omitted during this penitential season)

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come,

that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



FIRST LESSON Isaiah 64:1–9

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.
You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.
Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.
But now, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Be not so terribly angry, O LORD,
and remember not iniquity forever.
Behold, please look, we are all your people.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 80:1-7

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.
Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,
stir up your might
and come to save us!
Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!

O LORD God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
You have fed them with the bread of tears
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
You make us an object of contention for our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!

**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.**

SECOND LESSON 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

GOSPEL VERSE # 338 St. 1

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

1 Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art,
Dear desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart.

GOSPEL Mark 13:24-37

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the 13th chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] "In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning— lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.
Dear friends in Christ:

Today’s Gospel lesson continues the theme of the past few Sundays: Christ is coming again, and we need to be prepared. During the season of Advent, this theme is seen in the light of our approaching Christmas celebration. Just as we wait with eager anticipation for Christmas, so also, we should wait with eager anticipation for Christ to return. Being prepared means cultivating that spirit of eager anticipation.

Our Old Testament reading today gives us an example of such anticipation. “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,” says Isaiah. The prophet desperately wants the Lord to come and extend his help.

From the beginning, most of humanity has feared God coming down. Our own scriptures record for us times when God came down and brought natural disasters, stirred up armies to attack and struck people dead. Other religious writings have been even more descriptive of God’s presence causing pain, disaster and death. Many of these stories are quite disturbing, telling of God – or often “the gods” – acting in ways that are capricious and vindictive, angry and random, serving their own interests instead of humanity.

Today, we are taught not to be nervous about such things. In fact, we even joke about it – like the one which has God saying: “Don’t make me come down there.”

And yet, as with most jokes, it’s only funny because of the truth that is present. There’s still a part of us that worries about God seeing our sin and coming to set us straight.

The people of Israel knew that God was both just and merciful. They also knew that at His core He was loving and good. They saw this in God’s original intention for his people – to live in peace and harmony. That’s why, while they feared him in one way, they could also desire for him to come and be with them. And that’s what’s behind the words of Isaiah. When Isaiah says to God, “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,” he wants God to help.

Notice, too, that he wants God to come down with a show of force, in a big way – “rending the heavens,” with the “mountains quaking at his presence.” He wants God to intervene powerfully in the world.

Reading on, we see that he wants this because his adversaries have hurt him, and because he's frustrated that no one seems to respect the one true God.

When Christ comes again, he will come in a very big way. According to his own words: "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. The stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." That will be quite an entrance!

Christ's coming will be big in another way too – it will come at a time that is completely unannounced. Things will seem to be going along as normal, and then, suddenly, he will appear. The day and time will be a big surprise. And it will catch many people off guard.

Over the years, many people have claimed to know the day of his arrival. And some of these people collected large followings. They sold books and started new churches. Some even formed new denominations.

In 1828, William Miller, a quiet farmer from upstate New York, felt a call to tell the world about his discovery that Christ, according to his calculations, would return around the year 1843. As he began telling neighbors and church friends about these things, he found that on this subject he was quite eloquent. Word soon spread about this quiet but confident layman who was grounded in scripture and filled with hope. Miller was urged to publish his findings in a book, which he did in 1836. He titled it: *Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, About the Year 1843*.

As it so happened, the next year, 1837, saw a time of economic panic in the country. It also saw a growth in demand for Miller's book and speeches. Newspapers began to tell his story. Journals examined his calculations. Camp meetings with other evangelists were organized and a hymnal for the meetings – *The Millennial Harp* – was published. Historian Winthrop Hudson said that at the height of the "Millerite fever" there were probably more than 50,000 convinced believers and perhaps as many as a million others who were "skeptically expectant."

When 1843 came and went without Christ's return, the movement soon ground to a halt. A group of Miller's followers re-calculated the numbers and found that he was off by only one year. When Christ didn't return in 1844 either, the movement was completely finished. Today, very few remember that it happened at all.

We can understand this kind of movement to a degree. We, too, desire for Christ's return. We want him to come in the big way he says he will, to make things right.

But Jesus specifically tells us that no one knows the day or time. Not even him!

And to that last point, it may seem a little troubling to us to hear Jesus say he doesn't know. We question how Jesus, being God, could be left in the dark about such things. It doesn't seem right.

We answer that question by pointing to Christ's dual nature. He is, according to the scriptures, both God and man. And knowing that he is also the Son, we conclude that he is "equal with the Father with respect to his divinity, less than the Father with respect to his humanity" – to use the words of the Athanasian Creed. As true man, he did not always speak from his divine power of foreknowledge. There were things he didn't know.

What Jesus does know, and what he tells us, is that he will return in glory when the Father wills it. He will come again – in a big way – when the time is right. At that time everyone will see him and acknowledge him.

Until that time, it is important that we see and acknowledge him as he has already revealed himself. God the Son came down to earth once already. It didn't seem to be in such a big way. But it was. Jesus may have been born in the humblest of circumstances – in a small town, to a common girl, placed in a manger, etc. But he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And born of a virgin. At his birth angels sang, shepherds knelt, and wise men visited.

Jesus' birth may not have been a show of force, but his life and teachings set in motion forces that still move us today. His teachings on religious observance and cooperation order our days, weeks and years – inspiring us, correcting us and pushing us to work together. His self-giving upon the cross has changed our course and set us on the path of redemption. His message about forgiveness leads to healed relationships and peace-filled hearts.

In the life and ministry of Jesus, God came down to us in a big way. He took on the forces of evil and defeated them. He took upon himself the sins of the world and paid for them. He was faithful unto death and rose from that death to receive the crown of life.

And Jesus still comes to us in big ways. But again, these may seem very humble and simple.

He comes to us in the reading and preaching of words. He comes to us in the washing of a ritual bath. He comes to us in a small little supper of bread and wine. Humble and simple indeed. But through these means he accomplishes great things.

And God still accomplishes great healings too. He heals our souls for certain. But will extend healing to our bodies as well, as he knows to be best. He invites us to pray about such healing and has promised to hear us.

God rewards the life of faith and obedience. He extends his blessings richly to those who believe.

God comes to us and does big things. We don't usually know the timing of his actions. Sometimes we don't even see what he does. But we know that he is faithful to those who love him. He works in mysterious ways, yes. And his ways are always good.

In this year of pandemic in our world, we certainly long for God to come down in a big way and help us. Our times are challenging. Our faith seems in short supply.

God is our only hope for keeping faith alive in times like these. Without him we will turn inward in despair and turn on one another in anger.

"Come, Lord Jesus," is our cry for Advent. We pray this because we're ready for him to usher in the new age when it's time. And we also want him to come into our hearts and our world now to extend his help.

The Lord will come to us when we cry out in faith. He may not always come in ways that seem so big, but his arrival always has an effect.

"Come, Lord Jesus," we pray. And God hears. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #332 Savior of the Nations, Come

- Savior of the nations, come,
Virgin's Son, make here Your home!
Marvel now, O heav'n and earth,
That the Lord chose such a birth.**

- 2 Not by human flesh and blood,
By the Spirit of our God,
Was the Word of God made flesh—
Woman's offspring, pure and fresh.
- 3 Here a maid was found with child,
Yet remained a virgin mild.
In her womb this truth was shown:
God was there upon His throne.
- 4 Then stepped forth the Lord of all
From His pure and kingly hall;
God of God, yet fully man,
His heroic course began.
- 5 God the Father was His source,
Back to God He ran His course.
Into hell His road went down,
Back then to His throne and crown.
- 6 For You are the Father's Son
Who in flesh the vict'ry won.
By Your mighty pow'r make whole
All our ills of flesh and soul.
- 7 From the manger newborn light
Shines in glory through the night.
Darkness there no more resides;
In this light faith now abides.
- 8 Glory to the Father sing,
Glory to the Son, our king,
Glory to the Spirit be
Now and through eternity.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING *Savior of the Nations, Come* Setting: Walter L. Pelz

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

To You, O Lord, we lift up our souls and in You we put our trust. Do not let us be ashamed of our hope but come quickly to save. Sustain us by Your Holy Spirit, that we may have joy at the advent of Christ and welcome him with glad hearts. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Enrich Your saints in every way, and especially as we enter this new Church Year. Encourage the preachers of Your Word and all who hear so that the testimony about Christ may be confirmed among us. Give boldness and faithfulness to our pastors, church workers and leaders. And as You have called us into the fellowship of Your Son, so sustain us in prayer and good works as we wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Preserve and bless all Christian households, so that husbands and wives would live in love and service to each other, fathers and mothers would diligently bring up their children in Your fear, and children would honor their parents and be well-equipped for service to their neighbors in this life. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Be with the governing authorities and enable them to preserve peace and order in our nation. Bless our president and governor, our military and police, our diplomatic and civil servants, and our newly elected officials. Increase a spirit of unity and cooperation among the people of our land, as well as among the nations of the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Behold in mercy all who are in any danger, trouble, sickness or need. Hear our prayers for the sick and suffering [*especially _____*]. Give health to our world and bring the pandemic to an end. Comfort all who mourn, [*especially _____,*] and sustain them with a confident hope in the resurrection. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal Father, You have given all authority of judgment to Your Son, and his words will not pass away. Grant that Your people may hold fast to his words and be kept watchful and awake in faith. Sustain them in repentance and a true confession, and give them a hunger for his holy supper, that they may be reminded of both their forgiveness and their life together in your name. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, Father, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.
The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #353 Jesus Came, the Heavens Adoring



1 Je - sus came, the heav'ns a - dor - ing, Came with peace from
2 Je - sus comes a - gain in mer - cy When our hearts are
3 Je - sus comes to hearts re - joic - ing, Bring - ing news of
4 Je - sus comes in joy and sor - row, Shares a - like our



realms on high; Je - sus came to win re - demp - tion,
worn with care; Je - sus comes a - gain in an - swer
sins for - giv'n; Je - sus comes with words of glad - ness,
hopes and fears; Je - sus comes, what - e'er be - falls us,



Low - ly came on earth to die; Al - le - lu - ia!
To an ear - nest, heart - felt prayer; Al - le - lu - ia!
Lead - ing souls re - deemed to heav'n. Al - le - lu - ia!
Cheers our hearts and dries our tears; Al - le - lu - ia!



Al - le - lu - ia! Came in deep hu - mil - i - ty.
Al - le - lu - ia! Comes to save us from de - spair.
Al - le - lu - ia! Hope to all the world is giv'n.
Al - le - lu - ia! Com - forts us in fail - ing years.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE Jesus Came, the Heavens Adoring Setting: James L. Brauer

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