

MIDWEEK ADVENT WORSHIP
Wednesday, December 21, 2022

IN THE NAME OF JESUS, WELCOME TO ST. PAUL'S!

7:00 p.m.



WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP (*stand*)

The Spirit and the Church cry out:
Come, Lord Jesus!

All those who await His appearance pray:
Come, Lord Jesus!

The whole creation pleads:
Come, Lord Jesus!

HYMN OF LIGHT *LSB 891*

O Light Whose Splendor

- 1 **O Light whose splendor thrills and gladdens
 With radiance brighter than the sun,
 Pure gleam of God's unending glory,
 O Jesus, blest Anointed One;**

- 2 **As twilight hovers near at sunset,
 And lamps are lit, and children nod,
 In evening hymns we lift our voices
 To Father, Spirit, Son: one God.**

- 3 **In all life's brilliant timeless moments,
 Let faithful voices sing Your praise,
 O Son of God, our Life-bestower,
 Whose glory lightens endless days.**

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

We light the fourth candle on the Advent wreath as we draw near to the celebration of Jesus' birth. The Christ Child came in power, but his power was hidden in weakness. The little child who was wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger in Bethlehem, is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24).

Holy Child of Bethlehem, be born in us today. In power you come to save us!

The power of God to save is revealed in Christ Jesus—in his humble manger bed, in his weakness and suffering on the cross and in the empty tomb on the day of his resurrection! "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Holy Child of Bethlehem, be born in us today, for you are glorious in power and majesty!

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Because Advent is a season of preparation, let us prepare our hearts by confessing our sins.

We kneel

Almighty God,

we often turn away from your holy will to follow our own desires, and we give in to the temptations of the world around us. We fail to love others as we should and have sinned against you in our thoughts, words and actions. Have mercy on us and forgive us.

God has had mercy on us; and sent his Son to be our Savior. In weakness the Son of God, Jesus our Lord, died on the cross for all of us. Then in power he rose from the dead, triumphing over sin, death and the devil. Because of this, I announce to you that your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen! The message of the cross is the power of God for our salvation!

The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns

- 1 **The King shall come when morning dawns
And light triumphant breaks,
When beauty gilds the eastern hills
And life to joy awakes.**
- 2 **Not as of old a little child,
To bear and fight and die,
But crowned with glory like the sun
That lights the morning sky.**
- 3 **Oh, brighter than the rising morn
When Christ, victorious, rose
And left the lonesome place of death
Despite the rage of foes.**
- 4 **Oh, brighter than that glorious morn
Shall dawn upon our race
The day when Christ in splendor comes
And we shall see His face.**
- 5 **The King shall come when morning dawns
And light and beauty brings.
Hail, Christ the Lord! Your people pray:
Come quickly, King of kings!**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, at the right time you sent your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be our Savior. Coming in power to save, our Lord was born in Bethlehem and laid in a humble manger.

His mighty power was hidden in the weakness and suffering of his death on the cross and revealed in his triumphant resurrection.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, lead us to follow Jesus and walk in his ways.

Help us to be bold witnesses to his love and saving power so that others will come to know and worship him as Lord. Hear our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD,
saying,

“I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

The LORD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

The LORD is a man of war;
the LORD is his name.

“Pharaoh’s chariots and his host he cast into the sea,
and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea.

The floods covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.

Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power,
your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.

In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries;
you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up;
the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.
I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.’

You blew with your wind; the sea covered them;
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

You stretched out your right hand;
the earth swallowed them.

“You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have
redeemed;

you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.
The peoples have heard; they tremble;
kings have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;
trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.
Terror and dread fall upon them;
because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone,
till your people, O LORD, pass by,
till the people pass by whom you have purchased.
You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain,
the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode,
the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.
The LORD will reign forever and ever."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

NEW TESTAMENT READING

Galatians 4:3-7

In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL VERSE (Stand)

LSB 361

**O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel!**

As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON (Be seated)

Dear friends in Christ:

John knew of Christ's power. That's why he said: "he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." These words all witness to the great power of the one whom God was sending into the world.

You and I have a measure of power too. Some may have more, and some may have less. But all have it to a degree. Think of the times you've triumphed over a problem or achieved some kind of win. Even if they were just simple triumphs, power was exerted, and something was accomplished.

I used to play a lot of sports, and in sport... one team wins, and the other team loses. I was on my fair share of winning teams, and I recall that sometimes we would get so pumped up we would sing about it. Queen's song "We are the Champions" was our favorite. "No time for losers, cause we are the champions" ... it rang out with lots of gusto.

Today, I hear other victors singing Carrie Underwood's song, "The Champion." It says: "I am invincible, unbreakable, unstoppable, unshakeable. They knock me down, I get up again. I am the champion, you're gonna know my name."

These songs certainly reflect the joy of winning. But did you notice how self-focused they are? They're a celebration of "us" and "me." Other people are simply losers or those whose name is much less known than ours.

Some of that self-focus is fine of course. A lot of work and sacrifice went into the victory, and that's worth celebrating.

But much of the self-focus is simply excessive.

The Bible has its share of victory songs. And that's because the Bible is a great sacred story of the mighty acts of God, highlighted by displays of power and strength which mark God's victories over his enemies.

With those victories, God's people sang songs in response. And the Bible's songs are not characterized by personal bravado or chest-pounding strength. Nor are they celebrations of a nation, like a national anthem. Some songs, I'll admit, come close to this – especially those that give thanks for the nation. Still, even these songs are much more focused on God. They are victory songs that tell who God is and what God does.

The very first of these songs to appear in the Bible is the one we read as our Old Testament lesson today from Exodus 15. The song is sometimes called "The Song of Moses." And just so you know, there is another "Song of Moses" in Deuteronomy 33, sung not long before Moses died.

The song in Exodus 15 is also known as "The Song by the Sea." And that's exactly where the song was first sung – on dry ground on the other side of the Red Sea. The Israelites had been chased by the Egyptians right up against the sea. And seeing no way out, they had considered surrendering and going back to slavery. But in a display of divine power, God parted the waters and provided a way out. God's chosen people walked across the bottom of the sea with towering waters on either side. And then, when they were all safe and sound, God closed the waters on Pharaoh's army, and the army perished.

In this great victory, Israel had no right to self-praise or national pride. Their freedom had depended completely on God's character and action – God's mighty power to save.

But they did wish to celebrate. And who could blame them? They were beneficiaries of a great victory.

Their victory song, perhaps written by Moses himself, is a song celebrating the Lord. The focus of the song is the Lord's amazing power – shown over the forces of nature, the enemies of God's people, and history itself.

And here we should note that the Lord's name – Yahweh, the great "I am" – is used ten times in the song. Yahweh is the more personal and specific name of God – the one which Moses knew from his encounter at the burning bush. The use of this name, and its many occurrences, focuses us on the fact that this is a celebration of who the Lord is and what the Lord does.

Regarding who the Lord is... the song tells us: "The Lord is my strength and song" (v. 2). "He has become my salvation" (v. 2). He is "glorious in power" (v. 6). He is "Majestic in holiness – awesome in glorious deeds" (v. 11).

Who is the Lord? He is the one who has "led in steadfast love the people whom [he has] redeemed" (v.13); the one who has "guided them by [his] strength."

Strength, power, majesty, holiness, glory and steadfast love characterize the Lord! That's who the Lord is! The "Song by the Sea" is a celebration of the character and attributes of the Lord at work in a pivotal moment in sacred history.

Again, the song sees the victory of the exodus from Egypt as all God's doing. What has the Lord done? "He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and rider he has thrown into the sea" (v. 2). God's mighty acts are stated back to him: "You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters" (v. 10). "You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them" (v. 12).

The last section of the psalm (v. 13-18) looks ahead to the Lord's next victories as Israel faces the nations lined up against them—Philistia, Moab, Edom and Canaan. Written in the present tense as if the future is already coming in on them, the Israelites sing of their enemies' fear and ultimate defeat at the hand of God: "... they are

still as a stone, till your people, O Lord, pass by, whom you have purchased” (v. 16).

If you’re counting, the exodus from Egypt gives us three “Passovers” accomplished by God: the Passover of the angel of death which saved Israel’s firstborn; the Passover of Israel on dry ground through the Red Sea; and the Passover of Israel’s enemies as the Lord defeats them in battle. The poetic parallelism is striking. Just as the Egyptians sank “like a stone” in v. 5, so the Canaanites will become still “like a stone” in v. 16.

All of this leads to the confident assertion in the final verse that “The Lord will reign forever and ever” (v. 18). That phrase is used also in the Book of Revelation (11:15), and by Handel in the Alleluia Chorus.

In the verses that follow this song, Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, repeats the song’s opening refrain, accompanied also by women dancers and tambourines. “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and rider he has thrown into the sea” (v. 21). I’m guessing they may have sung this chorus over and over and over in joy.

In the great grand sacred story that hovers over our personal stories, this pattern, witnessed in the scriptures, is repeated often. God acts in strength, and God’s people respond with song.

Such is the case with another Biblical “song by the sea” – one that echoes the great song from Exodus. This song appears at the other end of the Bible, in Revelation 15. There John sees “a sea of glass” and calls the song he hears “the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (vv 2-3). This song is sung by those who have seen God defeat the beast. They sing, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!” (v. 3).

God’s people can’t help but praise His name through victory songs. And that is also the case for us during this Advent-Christmas season. Not only do we sing the many great hymns and carols that touch our hearts so deeply, but we make sure to hear again the ancient songs of Isaiah and the song of Zechariah that he sang at his son’s birth; the song of the angels over Bethlehem and the song of Simeon in the temple.

Unforgettable, especially, is the song of Mary, the mother of our Lord. We call this song the Magnificat because of its opening line about “magnifying the Lord.” In this song, the mighty power of the Lord is celebrated as well. Mary sings: “... for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:49). For Mary, being chosen by God to give birth to the promised Messiah was quite obviously a result of God’s mighty power.

And then there is the greatest of all sacred stories – the one in which God sends his only Son to suffer, die and rise to life again for us. Through the acts of this story God defeats our greatest enemies— sin, death and Satan. Like Israel, we are rescued and set free.

And in response, we sing our hearts out. Because it’s not enough to talk about God’s power and victory – we have to sing.

Looking around us with faith, we see other mighty acts of God too. And not just the ones in the big sacred story but also in our own personal stories. We may face sickness, loneliness and conflict, but the Lord gives us victory. We have times when we are weak, but the Lord powerfully lifts us up. And we have days when, yes, we falter, but we can still sing: “The Lord is my strength and my song” (Exodus 15:2).

When we sing: “O holy Child of Bethlehem ... Be born in us today” ... he comes to us. He comes bringing blessing, renewal, guidance and power.

No wonder we sing! Our songs are our witness to the power of God still working wonders among us.

Knowing this, may these victories of God, which he shares with us abundantly, resound in the songs of your heart always. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- 1 My soul rejoices,
My spirit voices—
Sing the greatness of the Lord!
For God my Savior
Has shown me favor—
Sing the greatness of the Lord!
With praise and blessing,
Join in confessing
God, who is solely
Mighty and holy—
O sing the greatness of God the Lord!
His mercy surely
Shall rest securely
On all who fear Him,
Love and revere Him—
O sing the greatness of God the Lord!**
- 2 His arm now baring,
His strength declaring—
Sing the greatness of the Lord!
The proud He scatters,
Their rule He shatters—
Sing the greatness of the Lord!
Oppression halted;
The meek exalted.
Full are the hungry;
Empty, the wealthy—
O sing the greatness of God the Lord!
Here is the token
All that was spoken
To Abr'ham's offspring
God is fulfilling—
O sing the greatness of God the Lord!**

ADVENT HYMN (Stand) LSB 352

Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord

- 1 Let the earth now praise the Lord,
Who has truly kept His word
And at last to us did send
Christ, the sinner's help and friend.
- 2 What the fathers most desired,
What the prophets' heart inspired,
What they longed for many_a year,
Stands fulfilled in glory here.
- 3 Abram's promised great reward,
Zion's helper, Jacob's Lord—
Him of twofold race behold—
Truly came, as long foretold.
- 4 As Your coming was in peace,
Quiet, full of gentleness,
Let the same mind dwell in me
Which is Yours eternally.
- 5 Bruise for me the serpent's head
That, set free from doubt and dread,
I may cling to You in faith,
Safely kept through life and death.
- 6 Then when You will come again
As the glorious king to reign,
I with joy will see Your face,
Freely ransomed by Your grace.

THOSE SERVING:

Greeter: Bob Juenger

Lay Reader: Melissa Hecht



Christmas Eve Worship - Saturday December 24

5:00 p.m. Candlelight service for families

7:40 p.m. Pre-Service Music

8:00 p.m. Candlelight service with Holy Communion

Christmas Day Worship - Sunday, December 25

10:00 a.m. Celebration of Christ's Birth
with Holy Communion

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