

LENTEN MIDWEEK SERVICE
MARCH 22, 2023

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

EVENING PRAYER

7:00 p.m.



THE ENTRANCE RITE

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

WELCOME

THE SERVICE OF LIGHT (Stand)

LSB 243 – 247

Jesus Christ is the Light of the world,
the light no darkness can overcome.

Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening,
and the day is almost over.

Let Your light scatter the darkness
and illumine Your Church.

PHOS HILARON

Joyous light of glory:

of the immortal Father;

heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ.

**We have come to the setting of the sun,
and we look to the evening light.**

We sing to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

**You are worthy of being praised
with pure voices forever.**

O Son of God, O Giver of life:

the universe proclaims Your glory.

THANKSGIVING FOR LIGHT

Blessèd are You, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who led Your people Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Enlighten our darkness by the light of Your Christ; may His Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for You are merciful, and You love Your whole creation and we, Your creatures, glorify You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

PSALM 141

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

O Lord, I call to You; come to me quickly;
hear my voice when I cry to You.

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

Set a watch before my mouth, O Lord,
and guard the door of my lips.

Let not my heart incline to any evil thing;
let me not be occupied in wickedness with evildoers.
But my eyes are turned to You, O God;
in You I take refuge.

Strip me not of my life.

**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.**

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

Let us pray.

Let the incense of our repentant prayer ascend before You, O Lord, and let Your loving-kindness descend on us that, with purified minds, we may sing Your praises with the Church on earth and the whole heavenly host and may glorify You forever.

Amen.

FIRST LESSON (Be seated)

2 Chronicles 26:1-5,15b-21

And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. He built Eloth and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his fathers. Uzziah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God, and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.

In Jerusalem he made engines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong.

But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor, and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God." Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar of incense. And Azariah the chief priest and all the

priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead! And they rushed him out quickly, and he himself hurried to go out, because the LORD had struck him. And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's household, governing the people of the land.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 110 (Read responsively)

The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.”

The LORD sends forth from Zion
your mighty scepter.

Rule in the midst of your enemies!
Your people will offer themselves freely
on the day of your power,
in holy garments;
from the womb of the morning,
the dew of your youth will be yours.

The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”

The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.
He will execute judgment among the nations,
filling them with corpses;
he will shatter chiefs
over the wide earth.
He will drink from the brook by the way;
therefore he will lift up his head.

GOSPEL HYMN (Stand) #554 Sts. 1, 4

O Jesus, King Most Wonderful

- 1 **O Jesus, King most wonderful!
O Conqueror renowned!
O Source of peace ineffable,
In whom all joys are found:**

- 4 **May ev'ry heart confess Your name,
Forever You adore,
And, seeking You, itself inflame
To seek You more and more!**

GOSPEL LESSON

John 10:11-18

[Jesus said:] "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SERMON (*Be seated*)

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

Inscribed at the Delphic Oracle – an ancient temple of pagan prophecy near Corinth in Greece – were the words “Know Thyself.” This statement succinctly but powerfully imparted a message that was very important in traditional Greek wisdom. People were not only to examine themselves for insight into their qualities and character, but also to know their place. In other words, if you’re a commoner, know that you are a commoner. If you’re an aristocrat, know that you are an aristocrat. Know your privileges and obligations. And most importantly, know that you are mortal. You are not a god, and you should not try to imitate the gods. Know thyself.

The idea of self-examination is one that is very much valued in our day as well. In fact, all kinds of tools and opportunities are available to help us do this.

But the idea of knowing one’s place goes against our culture’s grain. Our culture prizes being free of any restrictions. It teaches that a person can be whoever they want to be.

Such independence and self-assertiveness can be helpful to a point. But it can also lead to trouble.

Today in our series of examining Judah’s good kings we come to Uzziah, grandson of Joash – the king we examined last week. Uzziah, according to his scriptural introduction, “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done.”

Uzziah ascended the throne at sixteen and reigned fifty-two years, one of the longest-serving kings. He won victories over the Philistines on the coast and the Arabians in the desert. His fame even reached the border of Egypt.

And as with Judah’s other good kings, Uzziah’s success was not because of his own greatness. Rather, as the scripture tells us: “As long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper.”

The reign of King Uzziah, as described in 2 Chronicles, is defined by his strength. For instance, Uzziah broke down the wall of Gath,

the city from which Goliath had come. And ancient enemies, like the Ammonites, paid him tribute. He also fortified Jerusalem with high-tech weapons that could shoot arrows and stones from towers. He expanded the kingdom and made Judah rich. The scripture says “his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped.”

But then it adds the short phrase: “till he was strong.” The phrase points to a change. Once Uzziah got strong, something happened.

The scriptures tell us clearly what this change was. In his pride, Uzziah took a brazen step of overreach. One day, for no apparent reason, he decided to play priest. Uzziah entered the Holy Place in the temple with the intent of burning incense. This was in direct violation of God’s command, for only the priests, the sons of Aaron, were to enter into that place. Usurping this authority was a serious offense. An illustration of just how serious was given earlier in the scriptures. The books of both Leviticus and Numbers tell us about two sons of Aaron – Nadab and Abihu – who paid with their lives when they burned incense in an unauthorized manner.

But Uzziah was proud, apparently believing in his strength above all else. Thus he boldly entered the temple to do what only the priests should do. King Uzziah did not heed the maxim, “know thyself.” Instead, he let pride—the Greeks would call it hubris—grow inside of him.

The scriptures tell us that Azariah the high priest and eighty other priests tried to stop him. They said, “It is not for you... Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong and it will bring you no honor from the Lord God.”

But King Uzziah reacted in anger to this challenge of his authority. No one would tell him what he could and couldn’t do! Filled with pride, he believed his rule was supreme. After all, he was famous around the world. And he was strong.

Fame and strength, however, don't make one a priest. Offering incense in the Holy Place was not his role. Uzziah needed to heed the command of the Lord and accept its limits.

And here, before moving on, we should stop and do some thinking about our own sins of pride. What kinds of roles and authorities do we usurp? What kind of privileges have we convinced ourselves should be ours? What places do we desire to go that we know are off limits to us? What kind of power or identity do we claim for ourselves, even though we have no right? Are we content with what God has given? Or do we want something else? Or something more?

The Lord punished Uzziah for his impudence. Uzziah had overstepped his boundaries, and so the Lord struck him with leprosy. What's more, the leprosy appeared on Uzziah's forehead. The result of his sin could be seen right on his face.

And this wasn't simply a matter of sickness either. As a leper, Uzziah was now ritually unclean and therefore "excluded from the house of the Lord."

Uzziah was effectively removed from office as king, since the law for lepers was that they must be separated from the population. Uzziah retained the title, and possibly also some of the authority, but he lived in a separate house. The task of governing was now handed over to his son, Jotham.

Thus isolated, King Uzziah's strength and fame were of no account. His days of power were effectively over. Even at death, when he was buried in the kings' burial field, Uzziah was separated from his fathers, according to Levitical law (cf Lev 13:46). His whole identity had changed so that his epitaph was: "He is a leper" (26:23).

King Uzziah may have been a strong king at one time, but his strength wasn't sufficient. It didn't include the needed restraint. In the end, Uzziah's strength couldn't save him. And as such, it couldn't save his people either.

Such is the strength of kings. It's always limited – even with the mostly-good ones.

And yet, there is one king whose strength knows no limits; a king who is sufficiently strong to save us all.

This strong and saving king is Jesus.

Jesus' strength was not in military superiority. It was not in developing new armaments or in collecting tribute or in any other show of might. Jesus' strength was in setting people free.

Jesus freed people from demonic possession and from illnesses, including leprosy. Jesus freed people from undue restraints of the Law. And Jesus freed people from the power of guilt and shame.

But even more importantly, Jesus freed people from the power of sin and death. He did this by offering himself as a perfect sacrifice – one which paid the price of human sin.

Jesus, the Son of God, was not filled with hubris. Although the eternal Word was in the form of God, he emptied himself to be born of a virgin in the likeness of men. He was found humble and riding on a donkey as the crowds chanted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" And far from being puffed up with pride, Jesus suffered shame and spitting and mocking from sinners.

This Son of David humbled himself in obedience to his Father, even to death on a cross. He went willingly to his death. And there the Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep.

In his death, Jesus the son of Uzziah humbly took the role of priest. And this was not to gratify pride or show authority. This king of the Judeans became a priest to offer the one sacrifice his people needed.

Jesus was not weak like the sons of Aaron who had to wash for their own uncleanness and offer sacrifice for their sins before offering sacrifices for the people. Nor was his sacrifice feeble like their bulls and goats which, though continually offered, could never take away sins. His sacrifice was given as the perfect Lamb

of God – a single sacrifice which was sufficient to cover the sins of the world.

Jesus, the great High Priest, did not follow the order of Aaron, whose sons died one after the other. Rather, his priesthood is forever, like Melchizedek's – the great priest mentioned early in Genesis, of whom it is testified that he lives. The Book of Hebrews (chapter 7) tells us specifically that the Psalm's statement – "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110)" – is about Jesus.

As this Son of Uzziah hung on the cross, he endured the isolation of a leper. Jesus became sin and bore our sin in his body—all the uncleanness of our flesh. His separation from the Father resulted in his death as the Spirit departed his body. And at that time, the chief priests and rulers of the Judeans were sure they saw weakness.

But this was not weakness – of hubris or anything else. Rather it was the strength of Jesus' humble purpose. Never, in fact, was there strength like our Lord bearing the weight of the world's sin.

As the King of the Judeans hung on the cross, the curtain of the temple tore. And this indicated that the Holy Place now lay open to all who would follow the Son and Lord of David. Indeed, Jesus our king and priest is even now interceding for us, offering perfect prayers sweeter than any incense on earth. By his blood, says the scripture, we have confidence to enter the holy places.

And this is remarkable, because according to our place we are not sons of Aaron. Nor are we kings. In fact, we may have little strength according to the world's measure, and no fame or fortune either.

But in Christ, you and I are a chosen race and a royal priesthood. He has freed us by his blood and made us a kingdom – priests of his God and Father.

The Ruler of kings on earth has made you a place with him in the kingdom of heaven. Your place is in the presence of God. And there is no greater place to be.

Knowing this, let us boldly draw near to the throne of grace and receive God's mercy in every need. In the name of Jesus our king. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #529 (Stand)

Since Our Great High Priest, Christ Jesus

- 1 Since our great High Priest, Christ Jesus,
Bears the name above all names,
Reigning Son of God, surpassing
Other titles, pow'rs and claims—
Since to heav'n our Lord has passed,
Let us hold our witness fast!**
- 2 Since we have a priest who suffered,
Knowing weakness, tears, and pain,
Who like us was tried and tempted,
Unlike us, without a stain—
Since He shared our lowly place,
Let us boldly seek His grace.**
- 3 Sacrifice and suff'ring over,
Now He sits at God's right hand,
Crowned with praise, no more an outcast,
His preeminence long-planned;
Such a great High Priest we have,
Strong to help, supreme to save.**
- 4 Love's example, hope's attraction,
Faith's beginning and its end,
Pioneer of our salvation,
Mighty advocate and friend;
Jesus, high in glory raised,
Our ascended Lord be praised!**

OFFERING (Be seated)

Offerings support the church's mission work – both here and through our many partners. Offerings may be placed in the box at the sanctuary entrance or sent to the church through our website or the mail. **Fellowship Cards** help us welcome new people and track participation. Please fill one out and place it in the offering box following the service.

THE PRAYERS (Kneel) LSB 249

BENEDICAMUS (Stand) LSB 252

BENEDICTION LSB 252

SENDING HYMN #884 *Lord, Support Us All Day Long*

- 1 **Lord, support us all day long,
Guide and strengthen.
Evening comes, the world is hushed,
Shadows lengthen,
Work is done, life's fevered pace
Now has ended;
Christ, to You, our final rest
Is commended.**
- 2 **Be our light in darkness, Lord,
Our defender;
In Your presence perils all
Must surrender.
Drive all dark satanic snares
From each dwelling;
Then, at peace, our hearts Your praise
Will be telling.**
- 3 **With Your presence, Lord, draw near
Those who labor
Through the nighttime on behalf
Of their neighbor.
Grant them courage for each fear,
Faithful caring:**

**Your compassion and Your love
Truly sharing.**

- 4 Gracious Lord, we give You thanks,
Praise and bless You,
As the giver of all good
We confess You.
This past day we now commit
To Your keeping
And entrust to You the hours
Of our sleeping.**

DISMISSAL

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

THOSE SERVING:

Greeter: Steve Janssen
Reader: Janice Sebring

Acknowledgments

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