



SECOND SUNDAY OF
ADVENT

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DECEMBER 10, 2023

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



PRELUDE (10:30) *Pauline Bell Ringers* *The King Shall Come when Morning Dawns*
Setting: Tyleen Stults

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN (Stand) *Arise, O Christian People* LSB 354

- 1 **Arise, O Christian people!**
 Prepare yourselves today;
 Prepare to greet the Savior,
 Who takes your sins away.
To us by grace alone
 The truth and light were given;
 The promised Lord from heaven
To all the world is shown.

- 2 **Prepare the way before Him;**
 Prepare for Him the best.
Cast out what would offend Him,
 This great, this heav'nly guest.
Make straight, make plain the way:
 The lowly valleys raising,
 The heights of pride abasing,
His path all even lay.

- 3 **The humble heart and lowly**
 God raises up on high;
Beneath His feet in terror
 The haughty soul shall lie.
The heart sincere and right,
 That heeds God's invitation
 And makes true preparation—
It is the Lord's delight.

- 4 Prepare my heart, Lord Jesus;
Turn not from me aside,
And help me to receive You
This blessed Adventtide.
From stall and manger low
Come now to dwell within me;
I'll sing Your praises gladly
And forth Your glory show.**

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

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.

(We kneel)

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 on the cross, forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may serve You in newness of life, to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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 our hearts, O Lord,

**to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.**



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON (Be seated)

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.
A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

A voice says, “Cry!”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All flesh is grass,

and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades

when the breath of the LORD blows on it;

surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades,

but the word of our God will stand forever.

Get you up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good news;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good news;

lift it up, fear not;

say to the cities of Judah,

“Behold your God!”

Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,

and his arm rules for him;

behold, his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

He will tend his flock like a shepherd;

he will gather the lambs in his arms;

he will carry them in his bosom,

and gently lead those that are with young.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

(10:30) ANTHEM

As the Dark Awaits the Dawn

Text: Susan Palo Cherwien Setting: Carl F. Schalk

As the dark awaits the dawn, so we await your light.
O Star of promise, scatter night, loving bright, till shades of fear are gone.

As the blue expectant hour before the silvering skies,
We long to see your day arise, whole and wise, O lucent Morning Star.

As the moon reflects the sun until the night's decrease,
May your healing light release, living peace, unto your holy dawn.

Shine your future on this place, enlighten every guest,
That through us stream your holiness, bright and blest; come dawn, O Sun of grace.

SECOND LESSON

2 Peter 3:8-14

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

(10:30) CHILDREN'S SERMON

**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 1:1-8

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark the 1st chapter
Glory to You, O Lord.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,
the voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

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:

In Mark's Gospel, the eight verses just read set the stage for Jesus' ministry. Everything after these verses narrates his life as an adult. Mark's introduction is very brief.

By contrast, Matthew, Luke and John all devote many more verses to setting this stage. They have long introductions in their Gospels, consisting of things such as explanations of Jesus' lineage and descriptions of his birth.

Mark's introduction of Jesus may be short, but the eight verses he gives still pack a punch. There's lots in there to chew on – plenty to explore in today's sermon.

But before we do this, let me quickly point out that Mark also ends up introducing Jesus in other ways as well, and this year's Advent Midweek sermons are based on these introductions. If you haven't already engaged with the sermons, there's still time. You can do this by watching our service videos or by reading them online via our web posting. These will help give you a fuller picture of what Mark is doing.

Regarding our text today, let's begin our examination by noticing its first word. Mark starts his account by saying: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." In choosing that word "beginning," Mark no doubt wishes to parallel the first verse of Genesis – the very first verse of scripture.

Choosing this word makes it clear to the reader that the message to follow is one of extreme significance and that a whole new era has commenced. Jesus has arrived and things are no longer the same. From this point on, God will be doing new things – things we should all know.

According to the content of Mark's eight-word introduction this new era is characterized specifically by three elements. We will explore these three in today's sermon. In fact, the rest of the sermon will follow a three-part outline based on them.

The first of these elements to note is how the new era of Christ is characterized by good news. "Good news" is our best translation of that word "gospel." God, as we said already, was doing something new through Jesus. And not only new... but also something good.

By using the word "gospel" here, Mark hints at the type of presentation he is giving. He is not simply writing a biography – one describing the life of a person whom we may or may not find interesting. Nor is he writing a heroic epic – one that tells a great tale but ultimately has little significance. No, this writing of Mark's is much more important. It's uniqueness is seen in the

fact that its presentation and message are entwined in one word. Thereafter, the church would use this word to describe all four accounts of Jesus' life, as well to describe its main message.

Mark's Gospel, even though it is by far the shortest, uses that word "gospel" more times than the other three Gospel accounts combined. He first calls it the "gospel of Jesus." Next, he calls it "the gospel of God." Thereafter he simply calls it "the gospel." People are to believe the gospel (1:15), sacrifice for the gospel (8:35, 10:29) and proclaim the gospel (13:10, 14:9, 16:15).

Preachers have often pointed out that Mark begins his presentation by saying "The beginning of the gospel" but doesn't end it by saying "the end of the gospel." This is certainly worth noting. Jesus brought great good when he entered the world, and he continues to do so. His service to the world does not end. For although he has ascended into heaven, he is still present in this world through the Holy Spirit.

People who know the good news of the gospel can face life with joy in their hearts. They know that Jesus has saved them from their sins and that he will help them with their troubles.

As people who know these things, you and I have discovered how much we grow in faith and joy through the gospel's teachings and encouragement. We have a much greater peace than we would without it, for we rest secure in the gospel's promises.

Of course, our lives are not ones of complete bliss either. In this world we still struggle.

And this us leads us to think about the second characteristic of Christ's gospel era. The second characteristic mentioned in today's text is repentance.

Mark devotes the bulk of his Gospel's introduction to the message and ministry of John the Baptist. John's message begins with a call to repentance. His "baptism of repentance" was an act whereby the people acknowledged their need to be cleansed. Mark tells us that the people went out to him and confessed their sins.

John's message was not about repentance only. As part of the gospel movement, John pointed to the one who would bring the good news. He said: "After me comes he who is mightier than I."

Still, repentance was a key focus for John. And that's because John's repentance was a preparation for receiving the good news. Mark points this out by quoting the words "Prepare the way of the Lord" from Isaiah chapter forty.

In giving the full quotation, Mark indicates that this prophecy was being fulfilled in the ministry of John. John was the voice in the wilderness. John was the messenger who was preparing the way. And John was making his paths straight – doing so through a call to repentance.

Lest we think that this need for repentance ended once Christ appeared, we have only to note what Jesus said when he began his ministry. Mark 1:14 says that “Jesus came into Galilee,

proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Repentance prepares us to receive the Gospel. As such, repentance will need to be repeated throughout our lives, since we will continue to need the Gospel.

Martin Luther kicked off his Ninety-Five Theses by saying that our whole life is to be one of repentance. And in the Small Catechism he taught that “the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires.”

The season of Advent is a preparatory season, and thus a time to focus more sharply on repentance. We are to repent of our sins with all sincerity, for we know these sins bring with them suffering and pain. They drag us down, they hurt others, and they muddy our faith.

We can only appreciate the good news of Jesus if we first understand our sinfulness and our need for salvation. John’s message of repentance must ring clear in Advent and must carry over to the entire year as well, lest we fool ourselves into thinking our sin is no big deal.

John baptized with water to emphasize our need for cleansing. And as he baptized, he pointed to the one who would baptize in a similar and yet greater way.

And this is where we get to that third characteristic of the Gospel era. The era of Jesus will be one in which people are baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is about cleansing. When we are cleansed of our sin, a new spirit is created within us. God creates a right spirit; a holy one. To finish the Luther quote above about repentance, which, by the way, comes from his teaching on baptism: “a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

The Holy Spirit brings change to our lives – both in the new spirit we possess as a Christian and in the new promise under which we live. We live under the promise of

Christ's forgiveness, which means that God will forgive our sins for Jesus' sake when we come to him in repentance.

The new spirit within us, as great as it is, will continue to struggle in this life. Thankfully, we live under Christ's promise as well. The Holy Spirit is around and within us. Where there is repentance in the life of a Christian there is always the forgiveness of sins.

Furthermore, when John says that Christ will "baptize you with the Holy Spirit," he isn't just pointing to the Spirit's presence within us. He's also pointing to the Spirit's work among us. Luther taught us that the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." Here we are reminded of the many things the Holy Spirit does to bring people together and to bring about good in our world.

The new era begun and inaugurated by Christ – as Mark clearly shows – is characterized by good news, repentance and baptism by the Holy Spirit. Our task now, as followers of Christ, is

not just to be aware of this new era but also to participate in it. God is inviting us to be a part of this great era for the sake of our own souls and for the souls of others.

In this participation we can take our cue from John, who discerned his task as preparing the way for Christ. Like him we can do what it takes to let others know we have good news to share.

John put on the clothes of a prophet – camel's hair and a leather belt. We can clothe ourselves with holiness and godliness, as Peter urged in today's second reading. John ate what was available to him in the desert. We too can show our contentment with what God provides.

Most importantly, we can share the good news of the gospel, model and encourage a life of repentance, and live in the joy of the Holy Spirit. God has done a new thing for us in Christ. And he will continue to bring newness and refreshment as we have need.

"Come, Lord Jesus," we continue to say. And because we know his promises, we say it with hope and with faith.

Come, Lord Jesus indeed! In his holy name. Amen.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings!</p> <p>2 Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin;
Make straight the way for God within,
And let us all our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.</p> | <p>3 We hail Thee as our Savior, Lord,
Our refuge and our great reward;
Without Thy grace we waste away
Like flow'rs that wither and decay.</p> <p>4 Lay on the sick Thy healing hand
And make the fallen strong to stand;
Show us the glory of Thy face
Till beauty springs in ev'ry place.</p> <p>5 All praise, eternal Son, to Thee
Whose advent sets Thy people free,
Whom with the Father we adore
And Holy Spirit evermore.</p> |
|---|--|

APOSTLES' CREED

Hymnal, back cover

**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

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.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH (Stand)

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord's face would shine on us and save us; and that Christ would lead us in straight paths as He once led Joseph like a flock – bringing us out of the bondage of our sins and planting us securely in His eternal promises, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For diligent and faithful pastors, that like John the Forerunner, they would preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins and herald the Messiah as Savior for all, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For our citizenship in this land, that God would preserve us from trusting princes and mortal men above him; for our nation, that God would give us rulers who will rule after His good pleasure, keeping order and protecting life; and for godly quietness and honesty to prevail among us, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the sick and sorrowing, that the Shepherd of Israel would give ear to their need, especially those on our prayer list and those we name in our hearts at this time...; and for healing, courage and perseverance to all who cry out to God, that they may find comfort in His enduring Word and the certain hope of the resurrection, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Lord's patience and Holy Spirit, that when we have strayed from His commandments, we may be drawn back to Him in repentance, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all who commune this day, that we may receive this Sacrament rightly as Christ's true medicine of immortality; and that, with faith strengthened and sins forgiven, we may live in holiness and godliness, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

In the memory of the saints before us who rest in the Lord's presence, and for the Church on earth awaiting the coming of Christ, that God would preserve us until He gathers us to Himself in the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Hear us, heavenly Father, for the sake of Christ Jesus, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

OFFERTORY (Stand)

- 1 Lord Jesus Christ, we humbly pray
That we may feast on You today;
Beneath these forms of bread and wine
Enrich us with Your grace divine.**

- 2 Give us, who share this wondrous food,
Your body broken and Your blood,
The grateful peace of sins forgiv'n,
The certain joys of heirs of heav'n.**



THE LITURGY OF HOLY COMMUNION

PREFACE TO HOLY COMMUNION

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, whose way John the Baptist prepared, proclaiming Him the promised Messiah, the very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and calling sinners to repentance that they might escape from the wrath to be revealed when He comes again in glory. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth adored;
Heav'n and earth with full acclaim shout the glory of Your name.
Sing hosanna in the highest, sing hosanna to the Lord;
Truly blest is He who comes in the name of the Lord!**

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father:
Endless is Your mercy and eternal your reign.
You have filled all creation with light and life;
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Through Abraham you promised to bless all nations.
You rescued Israel, your chosen people.
Through the prophets you renewed your promise;
And, at this the end of all ages, you sent your Son,
Who in words and deeds proclaimed your kingdom
and was obedient to your will, even to giving his life.

THE WORDS OF OUR LORD

PROCLAMATION OF CHRIST

As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Therefore, gracious Father; with this bread and cup
We remember the life our Lord offered for us.
And believing the witness of his resurrection,
We await his coming in power to share with us
The great and promised feast.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Join our prayers with those of your servants of every time and place,
And unite them with the ceaseless petitions of our great high priest
Until he comes as victorious Lord of all.

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.**

PAX DOMINI

The peace of the Lord be with you always.
Amen.

AGNUS DEI

LSB 963

**Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world;
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world;
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world;
grant us Your peace,
grant us Your peace.**

DISTRIBUTION (Be seated)

Those wishing to commune at the foot of the steps should come forward first. Those wishing to commune at the altar rail should come forward after these, front rows first, from both sides of the aisle. After receiving, all should return to their seats. A common dismissal will be given at the end.

- 1 **“Comfort, comfort ye My people,
 Speak ye peace,” thus saith our God;
 “Comfort those who sit in darkness,
 Mourning ’neath their sorrows’ load.
 Speak ye to Jerusalem
 Of the peace that waits for them;
 Tell her that her sins I cover
 And her warfare now is over.”**

- 2 **Yea, her sins our God will pardon,
 Blotting out each dark misdeed;
 All that well deserved His anger
 He no more will see or heed.
 She hath suffered many_a day,
 Now her griefs have passed away;
 God will change her pining sadness
 Into ever-springing gladness.**

- 3 **Hark, the herald’s voice is crying
 In the desert far and near,
 Calling sinners to repentance,
 Since the Kingdom now is here.
 O that warning cry obey!
 Now prepare for God a way;
 Let the valleys rise to meet Him
 And the hills bow down to greet Him.**

- 4 **Make ye straight what long was crooked;
 Make the rougher places plain.
 Let your hearts be true and humble,
 As befits His holy reign.
 For the glory of the Lord
 Now o’er earth is shed abroad,
 And all flesh shall see the token
 That His Word is never broken.**

POST-COMMUNION COLLECT (Stand)

NUNC DIMITTIS

LSB 937

- 1 Lord, bid Your servant go in peace,
Your word is now fulfilled.
These eyes have seen salvation's dawn,
This child so long foretold.
- 2 This is the Savior of the world,
The Gentiles' promised light,
God's glory dwelling in our midst,
The joy of Israel.
- 3 With saints of old, with saints to come,
To You we lift our voice;
To Father, Son, and Spirit blest
Be honor, love, and praise.

BENEDICTION

SENDING HYMN *Prepare, the Royal Highway*

LSB 343

- 1 Prepare the royal highway;
The King of kings is near!
Let ev'ry hill and valley
A level road appear!
Then greet the King of Glory
Foretold in sacred story: *Refrain*

Refrain

- Hosanna to the Lord,
For He fulfills God's Word!
- 2 God's people, see Him coming:
Your own eternal king!
Palm branches strew before Him!
Spread garments! Shout and sing!
God's promise will not fail you!
No more shall doubt assail you! *Refrain*

**3 Then fling the gates wide open
To greet your promised king!
Your king, yet ev'ry nation
Its tribute too should bring.
All lands, bow down before Him!
All nations, now adore Him! *Refrain***

**4 His is no earthly kingdom;
It comes from heav'n above.
His rule is peace and freedom
And justice, truth, and love.
So let your praise be sounding
For kindness so abounding: *Refrain***

ANNOUNCEMENTS (Be seated)

DISMISSAL

POSTLUDE

Prepare, the Royal Highway
Setting: Robert Buckley Farlee

Flowers: The altar flowers are given today by the O'Neill Family in celebration of the baptismal birthdays this month of Katie and Ellie.

Those serving:

8:00 a.m.

Greeter: Bob Juenger
Comm. assist: Dede Dixon
Reader: Norm Williams

10:30 a.m.

Greeter: Charles Fisher
Comm. assist: Jill Hecht
Reader: Janice Sebring
AV Assistants: Hannes Buuck, Andreas Buuck

Acknowledgments

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