

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 15 December 2024

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-5

Opening Hymn: 293 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Confession of Sin

Most merciful God, Who are of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and hast promised forgiveness to all those who confess and forsake their sins; We come before You with a humble sense of our own unworthiness, acknowledging our manifold transgressions of Your righteous laws. But, O gracious Father, Who desires not the death of a sinner, look upon us, we beseech You, in mercy, and forgive us all our transgressions. Make us deeply sensible of the great evil of them; And work in us a hearty contrition; That we may obtain forgiveness at Your hands, Who are ever ready to receive humble and penitent sinners; for the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, our only Savior and Redeemer. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Psalm 86:5-7

Hymn of Preparation: 300 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Old Covenant Reading: Malachi 4:1-6

New Covenant Reading: Luke 1:57-80 (Sermon Text)

Sermon Title: *Mercy Received, Mercy to Come*

Hymn of Response: 301 Song of Mary

Confession of Faith:

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Diaconal Offering

Closing Hymn: 305 Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

PM Worship

335 Praise the Savior Now and Ever

22C Amid the Thronging Worshipers

351 How Deep the Father's Love for Us

Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 8:11-22

New Covenant Reading: Hebrews 2:10-18

Sermon Title: *Made Like His Brothers*

Fellowship Lunch – No Sunday School

Suggested Preparations

Monday (12/9) Read and discuss Luke 1:57–80

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened

and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. (ESV)

David Garland writes:

Jesus will affirm that John is more than a prophet and the last of the prophets, but Zechariah makes clear that “the prophet of the Most High” is subordinate to the “Son of the Most High” (1:32). His prophetic hymn has a Christological slant, and it becomes clear that “the main reason for blessing the God of Israel is what He has done for His people in Jesus the Messiah (Raymond Brown).”

In that regard, Zechariah says more than he knows. To “go before the Lord” from Zechariah’s point of view would not be the Lord Jesus but the Lord God. Elizabeth’s greeting in 1:43, however, introduces another Lord, and the narrative makes clear that John will prepare the way for Jesus. The ambiguity has theological consequences and is deliberate. John does not prepare the way for either the God of Abraham or Jesus but for both.

Schweizer scores the point: “the eschatological coming of God is thus identified with the coming of Jesus.” The meaning of “the Lord” is therefore transformed to include Jesus, whose mission and person is the incarnation of God’s visitation.

Read or sing Hymn 293 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Tuesday (12/10) Read and discuss Read Matthew 23:37–39

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (ESV)

R. T. France writes:

In the last of the seven woes the focus has begun to move away from the specific failings of the scribes and Pharisees to the more general hostility of Jerusalem to God’s messengers, and to the consequent judgment which is to fall not just on the religious leaders but on “this generation.” This coda to the denunciation now turns away from the scribes and Pharisees altogether to address Jerusalem as a whole and to speak of the judgment which will fall not just upon the people but upon “your house.” It thus prepares the way for the more explicit prediction of the destruction of the temple which will be given privately to the disciples in 24:2 after Jesus has, for the last time, left the temple behind. This is, then, the end of His public appeal to the people of Jerusalem.

Read or sing Hymn 300 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Wednesday (12/11) Read and discuss Malachi 4

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” (ESV)

John Mackay writes:

The people in Malachi's day were confused as to what was right and what was wrong. They were no longer sure the LORD existed – at least in any way that mattered for their living. They no longer considered that they lived under His scrutiny. So Malachi ends his prophesy by warning them that no matter how they felt, there was a the certain and impending reality of divine judgment. This is the 'burden' that he has to present to them (1:1). If they do not amend their ways, they will experience the full wrath of God (4:1). But his message is a plea. Can they not see the provision the LORD will make for all who are truly His (4:2-3)? There is a twofold piece of a advice that has to be followed: remember the law that the LORD had given through Moses to regulate the living of His covenant people (4:5), and pay heed to the injunctions to repent that had been the characteristic plea of the prophets (Zech. 1:3-4). It would also be the message of the last of the prophets, who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah (4:5-6).

Read or sing Hymn 301 Song of Mary

Thursday (12/12) Read and discuss Isaiah 8:11-22

For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken."

Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. And when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness. (ESV)

Dale Ralph Davis writes:

The watch-word of the remnant is always 'to the teaching! And to the testimony!' (v. 20). Only the light of the written word will carry us through the darkness of our times. This holds true whether the 'times' are dark historical times, dark personal times, or even the end of our present time.

The last makes me think of the last day of Robert Bruce's life (d. 1631) and that moving scene at the breakfast table. Bruce had come down to breakfast that morning. His younger daughter, Martha, was seated beside him. He had enjoyed his meal, was musing in silence when suddenly he burst out with, 'Hold, daughter, hold; my Master calleth me.' He asked that the Bible – the large house Bible – be brought, but his sight failed and he could not read. 'Cast me up the eighth of Romans,' he cried, and he began repeating much of it from memory, till he came to the last two verses: 'I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Then the blind, dying man, ordered and declared: 'Set my finger on these words. God be with you, my children. I have breakfasted with you, and I shall sup with my Lord Jesus this night. I die believing in these words.' 'These words' – that is always the Christian's slogan. Only in the teaching and testimony is there light and help and anchorage. The Christian is the man or woman who wades through the affairs of life always saying: 'Set my finger on these words.'

Friday (12/13) Read and discuss Hebrews 2:10–18

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

And again, “I will put my trust in him.”

And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (ESV)

John Kleinig writes:

In 2:5-18 we have the most comprehensive teaching in the NT on the purpose of the incarnation. By it God's royal Son was for a short time made lower than the angels to glorify mankind, so that, together with Him, they

could share in His glory and reign with Him in the age to come. By it God's holy Son died on behalf of all [His] people to sanctify them for priestly service as praise singers together with Him in His heavenly choir. By it God's powerful Son died to destroy the devil and free all those who were held in bondage to him by their fear of death. By it God's faithful Son became like His human brothers in every respect [except sin] and was tested like them by the worst human suffering, so that He might become their compassionate helper. By it God's sinless Son was ordained as a perfect Priest to make full atonement for sin. His incarnation therefore culminates in His work of atonement.

Yet His high-priestly ministry did not end with His sacrificial death to atone for our sins. He now reconciles us with God. As Melancthon notes ... He is our 'propitiator' before God. He assumed our human nature and suffered for us so that He could now "be our high priest for our reconciliation with God." He now intercedes with God for those whom He saves and brings them release from their sins by the proclamation and delivery of God's forgiveness.

Read or sing Hymn 305 Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Saturday (12/14) Read and discuss Luke 1:57–80

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
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that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
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And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
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to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. (ESV)

David Garland writes:

When Zechariah praises God for “raising up a horn of salvation,” readers familiar with the story know that God does more than cause Jesus to come into existence but will raise Him triumphantly from death. The result is that the word will go out to all the world, as Jesus commissions Paul “to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me (Acts 26:18).”

When Zechariah first mentions “salvation,” which he ties to God’s fidelity to His covenant promises, mercy, and power, it refers to rescue from enemies (1:71, 74). But in 1:77, he connects “salvation” to the forgiveness of sins, a key theme in Luke-Acts. It means more than the defeat of physical enemies. “The redemption of His people” will also entail forgiveness of sins and the reestablishment of something more than a political state.

The reference to the “darkness” and to the “shadow of death” are images of ignorance and sin, the existential plight of every human being. Humans cannot save themselves from this predicament because they live in darkness. Living in darkness means that one makes all the wrong choices that inevitably lead to spiritual and physical death. Hendrickx says that these images bring us “face to face ... with human existence itself – an existence which knows its own bitter fatality; the destruction of its very self-contained in itself, for it neither knows the way to happiness nor can it put off forever the return to dust.” The coming of Jesus promises to cast light into the darkness and banish the shadow of death.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow’s morning and evening worship services.