
Third Sunday of Advent

Year B

December 13th, 2020 9:30 AM



*St. Philip's
Episcopal Church*
BUFFALO, NEW YORK



Third Sunday *of* Advent

Make Gifts and Pledges Online



Although our church building is closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the work of our congregation continues, and the need for pledge income and gifts is urgent. The bishop's office is maintaining an online giving platform that accepts [gifts and pledge payments for any congregation.](#)

While in-person church services are suspended, the partnership dioceses will absorb payment processing fees so that your entire gift will go to your congregation for local mission. [Support your congregation online.](#)



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Join us by Phone or Zoom.

Sunday Mornings at 9:30 AM

Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/116359399>

Dial in to join us by phone:

(646) 558-8656 Meeting ID: 116 359 399

The Word of God

Celebrant: Blessed be God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

People: And blessed be God's Kingdom, now and forever. Amen

THE COLLECT OF THE DAY (BCP p. 357)

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen*

The Lessons (portions of these readings will be in the Zoom worship)

First Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;

they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.
For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.
I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

The Response: The Song of Mary *Magnificat*

Luke 1:46-55

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; *
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed: *
the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.
He has mercy on those who fear him *
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm, *
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, *
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, *
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of his servant Israel, *
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
The promise he made to our fathers, *
to Abraham and his children for ever.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. *Amen.*

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Gospel: John 1:6-8,19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Sermon

Pastor Steve will be delivering the sermon on zoom.

This is a sermon from Sermons that work from the Episcopal Church

If you have ever stood at the rim of a canyon, you know what it is to comprehend the immense majesty of emptiness. These clefts in the earth, carved by the incessant flow of water over millennia, are rocky vessels holding a world unto themselves.

Peer over the edge and look down into the sky held between the canyon walls—a highway for the howling wind and winged creatures of the air.

Look down upon the stubborn shrubs clinging to the ledges, where tiny crawling things seek their precarious shelter.

And then look down, down, down to the bottom, to the river—the sinuous originator of this landscape, still eroding and shaping the earth in its insistent passage towards a distant sea.

In the canyon, we perceive how negative space has its own power; we find that we are just as compelled by the vastness of what is missing, what has been hollowed out, as we are by what remains. There is a potentiality in the chasm, a certain thick luminousness, a sense of seeing deep into the heart of things that are usually hidden under the surface.

And perhaps it is in just such a wilderness place that we might imagine John the Baptist, his voice crying out, echoing off of the wizened rockface, mingling with dust and birdsong, proclaiming a coming that will soon carve its own path through the petrification of the human heart. A coming that will strip us bare of falsehood and pretension. A coming that will carve out an authentic understanding of ourselves in the cosmic landscape.

Like the emptiness of the canyon, though, our authenticity is predicated, first, upon an honest assessment of that which is not there, in order to reveal the deep truth that remains.

“Who are you?” John is asked.

“I am not the Messiah,” he says.

Are you Elijah? “I am not.”

The prophet? “No.”

Relinquishment of these identity markers is his first act of truth-telling. John knows that he must name the roles to which he is not called before he can affirm that to which he is. And so must we.

How often we wish that we were the Messiah, the long-expected sovereign of our own small dominions. How often we take on the titles offered to us, not because they fit,



but because they make us feel more real to ourselves. And how readily we assign these roles to others in order to suit our purposes. But just as the canyon only becomes itself in the void, so, too, with us: in each of our own negations, we get closer to the spare, essential truth of our identity.

“I am,” John admits, “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’” A voice, an invisible resonance piercing the air. Nothing more and nothing less than this. And this is exactly what God needs him to be.

John, the man of the empty wilderness, is himself a canyon-like figure, characterized more by spaciousness and depth than by any agenda of self-aggrandizement. He is one whose existence has been shaped to its depths by the Divine flow, and he embodies the way in which giving ourselves over to that movement is the pathway to honest, purposeful existence. He is the exemplar of how our lives become conformed to the shape of Christ—the Way-Made-Clear for the advent of God’s Living Water.

There is much for us to learn from him here, in the watery depths of the canyon, especially in this frenetic and anxious season. Faced with the multiplying needs of our families, our communities, and our planet, we are frequently tempted to take on far more than what we can actually do or be. And even as many of us attempt to slow down and be more attentive in this liturgical season, the world continues to surround us and shout, “Who are you? Who are you?”

But, like John, if we are ever to cultivate the space in ourselves for God to accomplish God’s work, then we must respond with:

I am not the Messiah.

I am not.

No.

We must be willing to disappoint the expectant throng. We must be willing to embrace the emptiness of what we were never meant to be.

And then, perhaps, we will find the one voice that was ours to claim all along.

For John, the purpose of his own voice is clear: the announcement of God’s incarnate promise. And so he baptizes in the river, that agent of transformative power, inviting others to let themselves be scoured by it—to let their layers of defensiveness and artifice be stripped away, to hollow out a space in their hearts in preparation for “the one who is coming after,” the Christ, the one who is making all things new.

And here, in another time and in another wilderness, John’s invitation remains open to us, and it is as urgent as ever because we are still learning who we are and who we are not. Like the canyon, we are still being shaped, still being laid bare to the wind and the light, still becoming as deep and open and vast as God imagines we can become. And, like John, it is only in the cultivation of our own holy emptiness that we will, at last, be the vessels of God’s inbreaking purpose:

to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn. (Isaiah 61:1-2)

The Rev. Phil Hooper was ordained to the priesthood in 2019 and currently serves as Curate at Trinity Episcopal Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana. A native of the west coast and a graduate of Church Divinity School of the Pacific (M.Div., 2019), he is passionate about spiritual formation, contemplative prayer, and the ways that these things impact our discipleship. Outside of church, you will likely find him in a local bookshop or on a road trip exploring the Midwest. His sermons and other writings are available at www.byanotherroad.com.

Prayers

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.
Amen.



PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

As witnesses to your light and truth, we come to you in prayer, O Lord.

Infuse the heart of your church with your Spirit and focus it on your mission. Renew your people and their leaders as they serve your purpose. Remind us continually whose we are.

Silence

Turn the hearts and actions of all the world's leaders to justice and peace. We pray for Donald our President, Andrew our Governor, the Congress and courts of this land.

Silence

Open our eyes to what is going on around us. Open our hearts to our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Move us to open our hands in love when they are in need and to stand up for them when they are oppressed. We pray for those suffering from natural disasters, from unjust economies, from hunger and want.

Silence

We know people around us who are suffering from anxiety, scarcity, illness, and loneliness. Some of them we know, and most are unknown to us. We ask that you assure them of your presence and sustain them with your grace. We pray for those we know by name:

Silence

Our hearts break when someone whom we love dies. May we be a comfort as we walk with grieving loved ones.

Your intercessions are invited either silently or aloud

Almighty and eternal God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth: Mercifully accept the prayers of your people, and strengthen us to do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYERS

(birthdays, anniversaries, hospitalizations, traveling)

THE GENERAL THANKSGIVING

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks
for all your goodness and loving-kindness
to us and to all whom you have made.
We bless you for our creation, preservation,



and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ;
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies,
that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to your service,
and by walking before you
in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

DOXOLOGY

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God all creatures here below;
Praise God above, ye heavenly Host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

BLESSING

May The Peace Of God, Which Surpasses All Understanding,
Bless You With Serenity;
May The Love Of Christ, Which Will Never End,
Envelop You in All Hope;
May The Spirit Of God Enliven You
To Do That Which You Can't Even Imagine;
The Blessing Of God---father, Son And Holy Spirit Be With You And Remain With You
This Day And Forevermore. Amen.

DISMISSAL

Deacon: Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.
People ***Thanks be to God!***

Christmas Eve

St. Philip's

Join us on Zoom as we Continue our Christmas tradition.

We will have a service of lessons and carols at 7:00 pm

Thursday December 24th.

Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/116359399>

Dial in to join us by phone:

(646) 558-8656 Meeting ID: 116 359 399



The Rt. Rev. Sean Rowe, Bishop

Pastor Stephen Lane, Priest in Charge

Rev. Lillian Davis-Wilson, Deacon

Mr. Emmanuel Conteh, Warden

Mrs. Josephine Cross, Warden

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