



Advent 2

December 8, 2024 † **9:00 AM**

*“Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come!” On this **Second Sunday of Advent**, we’re reminded that forerunners and messengers advance the advent of our God. While John the Baptizer’s voice in the wilderness may be the principal focus of the day, Malachi’s prophecy could just as easily herald the coming Lord Jesus as forerunner of the Lord. Ultimately, all God’s baptized people are called to participate in the sharing of the Gospel. In so doing, we prepare the way for the coming of the Lord and help all people capture a vision of God’s salvation.*

*Congregational responses are printed in **indented boldface italics**.*

GATHERING

GATHERING MUSIC

ENTRANCE HYMN: **“Prepare the Royal Highway”** *ELW 264*

*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:
Hosanna to the Lord, for He fulfills God’s word!*

*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!
Hosanna to the Lord, for He fulfills God’s word!*

*Then fling the gates wide open to greet your promised King!
Your King, yet ev’ry nation its tribute too may bring.
All lands will bow before Him; their voices join your singing:
Hosanna to the Lord, for He fulfills God’s word!*

ADVENT CANDLELIGHTING AND PRAYER:

Pr Dave sings a line, we echo it... and we light the Advent candle[s] as we sing...

*As the dark awaits the dawn... so we await Your light...
Star of Promise, scatter night... loving bright, loving bright...
Till shades of fear are gone...*

*As the blue expectant hour... before the silv'ring skies...
We long to see Your day arise... whole and wise, whole and wise...
O lucent Morning Star...*

*As the moon reflects the sun... until the night's decrease...
Let Your healing light release... living peace, living peace...
Unto Your holy dawn...*

*Shine Your future on this place... Enlighten every guest...
Through us stream Your holiness... bright and blest, bright and blest...
Come dawn, O Sun of grace...*

GREETING AND PRAYER OF THE DAY:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the † love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit are with you all.

And also with you.

Then let's pray: Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of Your only Son.
By His coming, give all the people of the world knowledge of Your salvation;
through Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

WORD AND PRAYER

PREPARATION FOR THE WORD:

*Martin Luther once said, "The Bible is the manger in which Christ is laid."
Pr Dave will sing this chant alone the first time; then we'll sing it through two more times:*

*If in your heart you make a manger for His birth,
Then God will once again become a child on earth...*

FIRST READING:**Malachi 3.1-4**

NRSVUE

The Lord proclaims through the prophet Malachi: See, I'm sending My messenger to prepare the way before Me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight— indeed, he's coming, says the Lord of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he's like a refiner's fire and like washers' soap; ³ he'll sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he'll purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years.

This is holy wisdom; this is holy word.

Thanks be to God!

SECOND READING:**Philippians 1.3-11**

NRSVUE

St Paul writes: I thank my God for every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every one of my prayers for all of you, praying with joy ⁵ for your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I'm confident of this, that the One who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

It's right for me to think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart, for all of you are my partners in God's grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness how I long for all of you with the tender affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ to help you to determine what really matters, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

This is holy wisdom; this is holy word.

Thanks be to God!

THE HOLY GOSPEL:**Luke 3.1-6**

NRSVUE

*Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!*



In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ as it's written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

This is the Gospel of our Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ!

*Oh, come, O Wisdom from on high, embracing all things far and nigh:
In strength and beauty come and stay; teach us Your will and guide our way.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!*

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

HYMN OF THE DAY: "Blessed Be the God of Israel" ELW 250

*Blest be the God of Israel who comes to set us free
And raises up new hope for us, a branch from David's tree.
So have the prophets long declared that with a mighty arm
God would turn back our enemies and all who wish us harm.*

*With promised mercy will God still the covenant recall,
The oath once sworn to Abraham, from foes to save us all;
That we might worship without fear and offer lives of praise,
In holiness and righteousness to serve God all our days.*

*My child, as prophet of the Lord you will prepare the way,
To tell God's people they are saved from sin's eternal sway.
Then shall God's mercy from on high shine forth and never cease
To drive away the gloom of death and lead us into peace.*

APOSTLES' CREED:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS AND SHARING OF PEACE:

Then trusting in this God, living in this Hope, let's pray for a world redeemed, the Church renewed, and all people restored in the Coming One:

God of timeless grace, You still meet us in the wilderness place to call us to Yourself. Clear from our hearts all that gets in the way of Your Spirit, and prepare the way for Your Word to dwell within and among us; then send us out to proclaim and embody the mercy and salvation that abides in You. Hear us, O God; ***Your mercy is great!***

Prepare the way of Your justice for Your people of every language, tribe, and nation, and comfort them with compassionate leaders whose hearts are set on the ways of Your righteousness. Bring peace to every land where violence, fear, and terror hold sway, and healing to all who've been victimized by such terror. Hear us, O God; ***Your mercy is great!***

Prepare the way for all creation to share in the heralding of Your Reign, that every element may be infused with Your care and that all may come to thrive in the bounty of Your wilderness-blooming grace. Hear us, O God; ***Your mercy is great!***

Prepare the way for those who live on the periphery of our communities to know Your gracious presence with them, and through us be their tender strength, their comforting courage, and their living assurance that they're not forgotten. Hear us, O God; ***Your mercy is great!***



Prepare the way for all who live in the wilderness places of sickness, grief, addiction, despair, the challenges of recuperation, or the nearness of death, that in Your presence with them, they may come to know not only comfort for their spirits, but renewal of strength and life. Comfort and heal them according to Your great wisdom and mercy, and remember those who have asked our prayers... Hear us, O God; *Your mercy is great!*

Prepare our hearts to receive You when You come to embrace us in love. Slash through the overgrown thickets of our insecurities, our self-justifications, and all the ways we've trampled on others *en route* to securing ourselves; tear us away from our complacencies and our easy surrender as slaves to sin; and open us to our deep need for You, that we may stop denying the truth about ourselves. Then have mercy on us and forgive us our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ. Transform our lives by Your Holy Spirit, that we may grow ever more fully into Your image and love. Hear us, O God; *Your mercy is great!*

Prepare the way for the communion of Your saints to be realized more fully among us, that with all those who've gone before us, we may sing Your praises with one voice in heaven and on earth. Hear us, O God; *Your mercy is great!*

For into Your hands, O God, we commend ourselves and all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy through Christ Jesus our Lord. *Amen.*

Hear the Good News, my friends: In the mercy of Almighty God, Jesus Christ has given His life for you, and in † Him, you're forgiven! Now reconciled to God and to one another, let's walk in Christ in newness of life.

The peace of the Lord is with you always. *And also with you.*
Reconciled to God and to one another, we share a sign of Christ's peace.

MEAL

THE OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS AND OURSELVES

OFFERTORY HYMN:

ELW 814

We'll sing this through three times:

Take, oh, take me as I am; sum - mon out what I shall be;

set your seal up - on my heart and live in me.

Text: John L. Bell, b. 1949

Music: TAKE ME AS I AM, John L. Bell

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EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER:

Blest are You, holy, mighty, and merciful Lord!

You bring light from darkness, life from death, speech from silence!

We worship You for our lives and for the world You give us.

We thank You for the world to come, and for the love that'll rule all in all.

We praise You for the grace shown to Israel, the people of Your promise:

the rescue from Egypt, the gift of the promised land,

the memory of the ancestors, the homecoming from exile,

and the prophets' words that won't be in vain.

In all this we bless You for Your Son, Christ Jesus our Lord,

who fulfilled and will fulfill all Your promises.

Living out Your death-defying love in word and deed,

He gave His life for us even unto death on the cross,

that filled with the Spirit of His resurrection, we might have eternal life in Him.

In the night in which He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat.

This is My body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of Me."

Again, after supper, He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all of them to drink,

saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood,

shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of Me."

And so, remembering His life given for us, rejoicing in His rising from the grave,
we await His final appearing when all things will be restored in Him.

Now pour out Your Holy Spirit upon us, that held and nourished by You,

we who share the Lord's body and blood may live as His body in the world,
shining with the light of Your Son.

All this we pray with joy through our Lord Jesus Christ, who's taught us to pray:

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.

THE HOLY COMMUNION

*Now we share God's consecrated gifts among God's consecrated people, knowing that our living Lord Jesus is fully present with us in His Supper, giving Himself to us in bread and wine and forgiving love. Today, we'll share the sacrament by "stations". Come forward via the left-hand aisle, take an empty glass from the tray by the front pew [or a glass of grape juice, if you prefer]; receive the bread from the pastor, receive the wine from our communion assistant [or drink the grape juice as s/he says to you, "The blood of Christ, shed for you"], and return to your seat, returning your glass en route. (We're **not** dipping the wafer into the wine). If you can't come forward, let the usher know and we'll bring the Sacrament to you! Those not receiving may come forward for a blessing. Once we've all shared in the body and blood of Christ, we continue in blessing and prayer:*

SENDING

POST-COMMUNION BLESSING AND PRAYER:

May the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in His grace.

Amen.

Most High God, You've come among us at this Table, and for that we give You thanks.

By the Spirit's power, form us to be bearers of Your Word,

sharing gifts of mercy and grace with all through Christ Jesus, our Host and our Guest.

Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Now may God our Creator complete the good work begun in you;

may Christ Jesus rejoice in your faith and compassion;

may the Holy Spirit fill your love with wisdom unto a harvest of righteousness;

and Almighty God, Father, ✚ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN:

“Hark, a Thrilling Voice is Sounding”

ELW 246



1 Hark! a thrill - ing voice is sound - ing! “Christ is near,” we
2 Wak - ened by the sol - emn warn - ing, from earth’s bond - age
3 See the Lamb, so long ex - pect - ed, come with par - don
4 So, when next he comes in glo - ry and the world is
5 Hon - or, glo - ry, might, and bless - ing to the Fa - ther



hear it say. “Cast a - way the works of dark - ness,
let us rise; Christ, our sun, all sloth dis - pel - ling,
down from heav’n. Let us haste, with tears of sor - row,
wrapped in fear, he will shield us with his mer - cy
and the Son with the ev - er - last - ing Spir - it



all you chil - dren of the day!”
shines up - on the morn - ing skies.
one and all, to be for - giv’n;
and with words of love draw near.
while un - end - ing a - ges run!

Text: Latin hymn, 1632; tr. Edward Caswall, 1814–1878
Music: MERTON, William H. Monk, 1823–1889

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND DISMISSAL:

God has a plan.

We’re it!

What’s our part in God’s plan?

Sharing God’s love in joyful service!

Then let’s go in peace, live in joy, and serve the Lord!

Thanks be to God!

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A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

Advent's a good time to remember that the Bible we read and revere is a wilderness text— a text borne of trauma, displacement, and loss. The ancient writers who penned sacred Scripture (and the vast majority of characters who populate its pages) weren't by and large history's winners. They were the persecuted, the dislocated, the enslaved, the desperate. They lived through periods of famine, war, plague, and natural disaster; they suffered starvation, violence, barrenness, captivity, exile, colonization, and genocide. They were, in countless ways, the wretched of the earth: brave, lonely voices crying in the desert...

But what did they cry? They cried their sorrow, of course. In the shadowed valleys of the wilderness, they cried their rage, fear, horror, and pain. But here's the remarkable thing: They also cried their **hope**— their fierce, muscular hope in a God who cares, a God who vindicates, a God who saves. Something about the wilderness experience birthed in them a capacity for profoundly life-changing, saving hope beyond hope.

So perhaps it's fitting that on this Second Sunday in Advent, we're invited into the wilderness to listen to just such a voice of robust hope, crying out the truth of God's faithfulness in the most bereft and desolate of places.

I've never seen John the Baptist featured in an Advent calendar, but all four Gospels place him front and center in Jesus' origin story. The Baptizer clothed in camel's hair is the only gateway we have to the swaddling clothes, angel's wings, and fleecy lambs we hold dear each December. As baffling as it may seem, the holy drama of the season depends on John's lone, abrasive voice, crying out in the wilderness.

"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius," Luke writes, "when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas," John hears God's word in the wilderness. That's seven seats of wealth, power, and influence in just one sentence— seven centers of authority, both political and religious, seven Very Important People occupying seven Very Important Positions. But God's word doesn't come to any of them. The story of the Incarnation begins elsewhere. It begins in obscurity, off the beaten path, appallingly far away from the halls of dominion and might...

Perhaps the first lesson of the wilderness, then, is a lesson about power. Our Gospel this week highlights a startling juxtaposition between those who experience God's speaking presence and those who don't. In Luke's account, emperors, governors, rulers, and high priests, the folks who wield power, don't hear God— but the outsider from the wilderness does. The word of the Lord comes to John, the one who gives up his hereditary claim to the priesthood, trading its clout and comfort for the privations and humiliations of the desert.

What is it about power that deafens us to the Word? Maybe Tiberius, Pilate, Caiaphas, and Herod can't receive a fresh revelation from God because they presume to hear and speak for God already. After all, they're in power. Doesn't that mean that they embody God's will automatically? If not, well, who cares? They already have pomp, money, military might, and the weight of religious tradition at their disposal. They don't need God...

But in the wilderness, there's no safety net, no Plan B, no fallback option. In the wilderness, life is raw and risky, and our illusions of self-sufficiency fall apart quickly. To locate ourselves at the outskirts of power is to confess our vulnerability in the starkest terms. In the wilderness, we have no choice but to wait and watch as if our lives depend on God showing up, because they do. And it's into such an environment— an environment so far removed from power as to make power laughable— that the word of God comes.

But Luke goes on. Not only is the wilderness a place that exposes our need for God; it's a place that calls us to repentance. "John went into all the region around the Jordan," Luke tells us, "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Elsewhere in the Gospels, we read that crowds streamed into the wilderness to heed John's call. In other words, they left the lives they knew best and ventured into the unknown to save their hearts through repentance. Something about the wilderness brought people to their knees. Something about the possibility of confession and absolution stirred and compelled them to turn their staid lives, routines, and rituals upside down.

Yes, I know that "sin" and "repentance" are loaded words. I know we're wary of them, for good reasons. They're words which have been weaponized to frighten and diminish us. They're words that've been deployed in very narrow ways to pit us against each other politically, economically, and culturally.

But here's the thing: Advent begins with an honest, wilderness-style reckoning with sin. We can't get to the manger unless we go through John, and John is all about repentance. Is it possible that this might become an occasion for our liberation? ***Maybe, if we can get past our baggage and follow John out into the wilderness, we'll find comfort in the fact that we don't have to pretend to be perfect anymore.*** We don't have to deny the truth, which is that we struggle and stumble and make mistakes and mess up. We can face the reality that we're fallible human beings, prone to wander, and incapable of living up to our own ideals. And most importantly, we can fall with abandon and relief into the forgiving arms of a God who loves us as we are. We can live into the tenacious hope of our Biblical ancestors— the hope of restoration, the hope of abundant and overflowing grace, the hope of salvation.

Finally, Luke suggests that the wilderness is a place where we can see the landscape whole, and participate in God's great work of leveling. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Luke predicts a day when "every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth." Unless we're in the wilderness, it's hard to see our own privilege, and even harder to imagine giving it up. No one standing on a mountaintop wants the mountain flattened. But when we're wandering in the wilderness, and immense, barren landscapes stretch out before us in every direction, we're able to see what privileged locations obscure. Suddenly, we feel the rough places beneath our feet. We experience what it's like to struggle down twisty, crooked paths. We glimpse arrogance in the mountains and desolation in the valleys, and we begin to dream God's dream of a wholly reimagined landscape— a landscape where the valleys of death are filled and the mountains of oppression are flattened, a landscape so smooth and straight, it enables "all flesh" to see the salvation of God.

So where are you located during this Advent season? How close are you to power, and how open are you to risking the wilderness to hear a word from God? What might repentance look like for you, here and now? Where's God leveling the ground you stand on, and what will it take for you to participate in that uncomfortable but essential work? The word of the Lord came to John in the wilderness. May it come to us, too. Like John, may we become hope-filled voices in desolate places, preparing the way of the Lord.

• *Debie Thomas*