

# The First Sunday in Advent

29 November 2020

**Grace Episcopal Church**

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Honesdale, PA

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**The FIRST Sunday in ADVENT, 2020**  
*Virtual Grace*

Organ Prelude - *“Each winter as the world grows older”* Annabeth & William Gay

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Happy New Year and Hello and welcome to “Virtual Grace”  
from Grace Episcopal Church in Honesdale, PA,  
as we celebrate the first Sunday in Advent.  
preparing for the coming of the Christ-child.

I’m Fr. Ed, the rector of our parish.  
As the numbers of Covid positives has risen in this second wave,  
our doors are again closed.

And yet, we are glad to continue to offer these broadcasts of “Virtual Grace.”  
So many of you have followed us in this way since March,  
for which we give thanks.

We are grateful to all who donated to, prepared and served 250 Thanksgiving  
dinners this week - our new stoves and new refrigerator are a blessing.  
And especially our thanks to Laura Dyser and Sue Erb  
for their planning and organization to make this one of our best  
holiday celebrations - even in the midst of the pandemic.

Your continued donations to the ministry and mission  
of Grace Church in these turbulent times, have been deeply appreciated.  
We know so many people are struggling - financially, socially, personally,  
especially as we enter the holiday season.  
It our mission to aid any and everyone in whatever way we can,  
to spread the Good News of Salvation  
in whatever situation someone may find themselves.  
If you are able to contribute to our ministry, we appreciate your help,  
*and* your prayers.

If you, or anyone you know, are in any pastoral need at all, call me, 24/7.  
I am more than ready to come to your spiritual aid and visit you -  
sadly, still with a mask!

Now, let us join our hearts and souls in praise to God,  
knowing that our salvation lies only in our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,  
in this life and in the world to come.

#### BLESSING & LIGHTING of the ADVENT CANDLE

It is my hope that many of you may have Advent Wreath forms, greens and candles from years past. I invite you as I bless our parish wreath and candles and light the first week, you will do so at home.

A Reading from the prophet Isaiah:

The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

*Isaiah 60: 19-20*

Let us pray:

Holy God, bless this wreath and those in our homes and the candles we offer, that as we mark the passing of time in preparation for the arrival of your Son, we may be kindled with your love and charity as He who came to be among us, in the Name of Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### CONFESSION & ASSURANCE of PARDON

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

*Hebrews 4:14, 16*

Let us confess our sins against God and our fellow sisters and brothers.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart;

we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us;  
that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive our sins through our savior Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, strengthen us in all goodness, ✚ and keep us in eternal life. Amen.

FIRST READING

*Isaiah 64:1-9*

O that you, O LORD, would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence-- as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil-- to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

Here ends the Reading.

GRADUAL

*Psalm 80: 1-7, 16-18*

Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; \*  
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.  
In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, \*  
stir up your strength and come to help us.  
Restore us, O God of hosts; \*  
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

O Lord God of hosts, \*  
how long will you be angered despite the prayers of your people?  
You have fed them with the bread of tears; \*  
you have given them bowls of tears to drink.  
You have made us the derision of our neighbors, \*  
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.  
Restore us, O God of hosts; \*  
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

## SECOND READING

*from Luke 1: 5-7, 11-25*

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

There appeared to Zechariah an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah... Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord... Even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur." Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak.

When his time of service was ended, Zechariah went to his home. After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

Here ends the Reading.

## MEDITATION

*Each winter as the year grows colder, we each grow older, too.  
The chill sets in a littler colder;  
the verities we knew seem shaken and untrue.*

*“Carol of Hope,” Annabeth and William Gray*

I'd be willing to bet none of you have ever heard of Zechariah.  
There is the book of the prophet Zechariah in the Old Testament  
Zechariah who had eight visions of the restoration of Israel.  
But he is not our Zechariah of today, ours is a high priest of the Temple  
in the restored Jerusalem,  
and the husband of Elizabeth, who you may have heard of.  
In two weeks we will hear the familiar story of Blessed Mary  
visiting her cousin Elizabeth, bot who will be pregnant,  
one with John who became the Baptist,  
and the other, of course, awaiting the coming of Jesus.

Zechariah and Elizabeth, forgotten figures in the infancy stories of the Gospel.  
But should be important to us, to hear their story, and sing their song.

*I believe beyond believing that life can spring from death;*

*Carol of Hope, st. 3*

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth,  
Elizabeth, who is the New Testament persona of Hannah in the Old -  
both of an advanced age, beyond child-bearing,  
giving up hope long years prior to having a child,  
and now, in advanced years, an angel appears with a promise.  
You shall conceive and bear a child.  
Sarah, Abraham's wife, in a similar condition of barren age,  
laughed at the angel,  
and Itzak, which means 'she laughed' was born.  
Sarah, Hannah, and now Elizabeth.  
Abraham, Elkanah, and now Zechariah.  
Women and men who had given up hoping for new birth.

*So even as the sun is turning to journey to the north,  
the living flam, in secret burning, can kindle on the earth  
and bring God's love to birth.*

*Carol of Hope, st. 4*

We all have had our hopes and dreams.

I wonder - when did Zechariah give up,  
and Elizabeth with her grief and embarrassed  
by the way her townsfolk talked behind her back - she knew.  
In a few weeks, we will hear of Anna, an 84-year old woman,  
who served the Temple,  
after losing her husband only 7 years into their marriage.  
Hopes, dreams, plans - and then with Joseph next week,  
a man engaged with hopes of a life, love and family  
who discovers his intended is pregnant - not by him.  
All this is back story for the hope of salvation.  
This Advent, this 2020, a time of the darkness and cold of winter.  
When the earth groans in travail, as the prophet imagines.

An anonymous writer for Faith Gateway puts it this way:

As we grapple with our own unfulfilled yearnings and unmet needs, may we remember that the events of so long ago echo in our lives today. We still long for fulfillment; we still desire someone who will meet our needs. In Zechariah's and Elizabeth's blessing of their son John, the herald of the One to come, we see the answer to our own struggles. God will provide.

*anonymous, from FaithGateway/Zondervan*

The question weighs heavily upon us.

God *will* provide -

but *what* will God provide?

And when,

when, O God, will you break forth the heavens?

The prophet shouts on our behalf:

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!”

Let not your prayers, Zechariah, cease in silence.

Let your daily tasks overshadow your embarrassment, Elizabeth.

Let your laughter of disbelief, Sarah, turn to songs of joy.

Let your hope be fulfilled for nations yet unborn, Father Abraham.

So many people of devotion for millennia have sat in that darkness.

On Christmas Day, we will hear these words at the beginning of John's Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

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. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. *John 1:1-9*  
*IS coming into the world.*

While the world may now sit in darkness,  
we of faith know deep within our souls that light will come;  
and we of hope and faith in the saving God  
must proclaim that same message we will hear from John.

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom your captive people.*

Amen.

Let us offer the words of our faith using the Apostles' Creed.

The 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 to the dead.

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, Form II, *adapted*

BCP, p.385

I ask your prayers for God's people throughout the world; for Justin, the Archbishop of Canterbury; Michael, our Presiding Bishop; Kevin, our Bishop; and for all ministers and faithful. Pray for the Church.

*Silence*

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people. Pray for justice and peace at home and abroad.

*Silence*

I ask your prayers for the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, those in prison, those separated from loved ones, for the sick, and especially the elderly and those suffering from Covid-19. Pray for those in any need or trouble.

*Silence*

I ask your prayers for the departed, especially those who have succumbed to the virus, and those killed by violent acts. Pray for those who have died.

*Silence*

I ask your prayers for students and scholars who prepare for semester finals; for those who travel this holiday weekend.

*Silence*

I ask your thanksgiving for loved ones, and the creative ways they and we have found to share our love.

*Silence*

Praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honored. Pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day.

*Silence*

Let us now pray together in the words which Christ himself taught us, saying:

Our Father...

### *BLESSING*

The Lord bless us and keep us

The Lord make his face to shine upon us,  
and be gracious to us.

The Lord lift his countenance upon us, and give us peace.

*Amen.*

In our various ways, let us go forth and proclaim to the world the love of God as has been made known to us. Alleluia, alleluia!

Organ Postlude -

*“People, look East”*

Hymn #724

Eleanor Farjeon/*Basançon carol* (harm. John Hooker)