

The Third Sunday in Advent

13 December 2020

Grace Episcopal Church

827 Church Street
Honesdale, PA

The Rev'd Edward K. Erb, rector

rector@gracechurchhonesdale.org

570-241-2685

The THIRD Sunday in ADVENT, 2020
Virtual Grace

Organ Prelude -

“O Come, O Come Immanuel”

M. D. Lehr

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Hello and welcome to “Virtual Grace”
from Grace Episcopal Church in Honesdale, PA,
as we celebrate the third 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.

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 in this holiday season.
It is 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.

And 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.

LIGHTING of the 3rd ADVENT CANDLE

Let us gather near our Advent Wreaths, and as I light the second candle, I invite you to do the same at home.

A reading from the Revelation to St. John:

Revelation 22: 4-5

The servants of the Lamb will see the face of God, whose name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night; they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.

The third candle is lit.

Let us pray:

Blessed are you, sovereign God, our light and our salvation; to you be glory and praise forever; you led your people to freedom by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night; May we who walk in the light of your presence acclaim your Christ, rising victorious, as he banishes all darkness from our hearts and minds. Blessed be your Name forever. Amen

CONFESSION & ASSURANCE of PARDON

Jesus said, "The first commandment is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:29-31

With these words on our minds and in our hearts, 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.

Listen now to words from the prophet Zephaniah.

FIRST READING

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.

Here ends the Reading.

GRADUAL

Psalms 113

Hallelujah! Give praise, you servants of the Lord; *
praise the Name of the Lord.
Let the Name of the Lord be blessed, *
from this time forth for evermore.
From the rising of the sun to its going down *
let the Name of the Lord be praised.
The Lord is high above all nations, *
and his glory above the heavens.
Who is like the Lord our God, who sits enthroned on high *
but stoops to behold the heavens and the earth?
He takes up the weak out of the dust *
and lifts up the poor from the ashes.
He sets them with the princes, *
with the princes of his people.
He makes the woman of a childless house *
to be a joyful mother of children.

SECOND READING

Luke 1: 39-47

Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted [his wife] Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child [John] leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Here ends the Reading.

The SONG of MARY

BCP p. 91

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.

MEDITATION

TWO PREGNANT LADIES

So what do two pregnant ladies talk about?

Heck if I know.

Baby showers.

Not fitting into their clothes.

Back aches.

And I have it on reliable sources - the condition of their bladders.

"So, does it hurt when the baby flips, or punches and kicks?" I asked a few ladies.

"No, not at all. It feels funny, but it doesn't hurt."

"Doesn't it even make you queasy or nauseous?"

"No. It's, well, hard to describe.

Here's this miracle inside you, growing and becoming human."

Every pregnancy is a miracle.

But when both are divinely foretold and one divinely produced, well...

So, here are these two pregnant ladies.

One is - as the Bible says, "getting on in age" -

or as the old Prayer Book would say, "of riper age" - and barren,

Elizabeth knew that she was ridiculed by the other women behind her back.

The other is a young, un-married teenager.

And oh! What the townspeople said about *her*!

But today's story is more a matter of the end of Elizabeth's chapter,

than a continuation of Mary's story -

Mary's time to shine will come.

But this scene is Elizabeth's aria.

Just a bit earlier in Luke's account of the Gospel,

we heard of Zechariah and Elizabeth,

the angel Gabriel proclaiming the conception of John

who will become the Baptist.

Now we have it that Elizabeth and Zechariah are in their country home.

And cousin Mary - the young, unmarried, pregnant, cousin Mary -
comes to, well, honestly, hide away for a few months -
hide away from her own ridicule from the people.

But, as I said, this is not Zechariah's story, nor Mary's, but Elizabeth's.

In our record, Elizabeth is the first to acknowledge Jesus as Lord,

as her Lord, as our Lord -

a divine, personal, right here with us, Immanuel, Lord and Savior.

Not many baby showers include such a revelation!

But then Elizabeth's heritage was to be more than the usual boy, either.

She must have known that as well,

for not many babies are foretold by an archangel

and a miraculous sign that your husband is not crazy, just mute.

Sam Portaro in his book *Brightest and Best*

suggests that both the old and the young, find divine meaning
and personal fulfillment in their all-too-human predicament.

And while St. Luke would also invite us to view these two women together

from both ends of the spectrum, for today, I would suggest that

there is a message in Elizabeth particularly for us.

Persevere through embarrassment and societal ridicule, suffer if you must,

but don't let others' thoughts overwhelm or take control of you.

While it may have been Zechariah's prayer to procreate,

we have no indication that Elizabeth went along with the plan.

After all, is this older woman, "getting on in age" really wanting a baby?

Nonetheless, she does go along with the plan -

"God's adventure" as Mother Barbara Crafton calls it.

We sing with Mary, the *Magnificat*.

But Elizabeth has her own song of praise.

Rejoice then with Elizabeth and the child within

when our Lord and Savior comes into your dwelling.

Blessed is Mary, the Church proclaims.

But even more so, blessed is Elizabeth

as she is the first to proclaim our Lord and Savior

Jesus Christ, the child of Mary, the Son of God.

So let us give this seemingly forgotten character in the drama her due.

Let us recognize and honor all those 'of lowly degree' in God's drama,

in history, in this time of our history - in this time of God's story.

Blessed is she who believes and proclaims salvation.

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.

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 symptoms. 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 thanksgiving for loved ones, and the creative ways they and we have found to share our love. Pray for our families wherever they may be.

Silence

To sum up all these petitions, let us 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 -

"The Magnificat"

plainsong setting by C. Winfred Douglas