

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

20 December 2020

Grace Episcopal Church

827 Church Street
Honesdale, PA

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The FOURTH Sunday in ADVENT, 2020
Virtual Grace

Organ Prelude -

“Lo! How a Rose is blooming”

arr. Ray Davidson

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day we invite you back here for a special service
of Lessons & Carols.

We will send out to the parish - and any of you who request -
an e-mail with the words to the carols we are using
so that you may sing along at home.

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.

We appreciate all the help, donations, best wishes and prayers
that have been offered to the Church.

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 4th ADVENT CANDLE

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

A reading from the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 60: 1-3

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon
you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD
will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your
light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

The fourth candle is lit.

Let us pray:

Eternal God, through long generations you prepared a way for the coming
of your Son, and by your Spirit you still bring light to illumine our paths;
renew us in faith and hope that we may welcome Christ to rule our thoughts
and claim our love; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

from A Prayer Book for Australia, p.465

CONFESSION & ASSURANCE of PARDON

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:8,9

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.

Hear now to words from the prophet Malachi.

FIRST READING

Malachi 3: 1-4

See, I am 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 is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Here ends the Reading.

GRADUAL

Psalm 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: 57-66

The time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?"

Here ends the Reading.

The SONG of ZECHARIAH

BCP p. 92

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; *
he has come to his people and set them free.
He has raised up for us a mighty savior, *
born of the house of his servant David.
Through his holy prophets he promised of old,
that he would save us from our enemies, *
from the hands of all who hate us.
He promised to show mercy to our fathers *
and to remember his holy covenant.
This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, *
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
Free to worship him without fear, *
holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.
You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, *
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation *
by the forgiveness of their sins.
In the tender compassion of our God *
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, *
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.
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.

MEDITATION

WHAT'S IN A NAME

I was wrong - once.
But it's OK, because Sue's Mom was wrong with me.
Child number two was to be a girl - Sarah Reneé.
Janet's car was filled with pink.
I named number one, and we agreed that Sue would name number two.
And she picked two names, just in case.
But we were confident in God's promise of a girl -
at least Janet and I were.
Birth pangs,
and it was fortunate that we lived, catty-cornered across from the hospital.
After two weeks of false-labor,
it was a surprise that the baby was coming this quickly that Saturday morning.
And, guess what.
It was a boy.
His Name is Sarah!
Well, not quite.
No bags packed, phone calls to the grandparents, so I ran across the street to home.
Came back.

Sue said the nurse had come around with the birth certificate
and asked the baby's name.

"So, what did you say?"

"Andrew Richard."

"That's nice. I like that. But I thought it was to be Alexander."

"That's it. I knew it started with an 'A'."

What's in a name.

Those of us 'of riper age' will remember the Dick Van Dyke Show.

Do you remember, though what their son's middle name was?

There was a whole episode when little Ritchie tried to find out,
and Dick Van Dyke and Mary Tyler Moore did everything they could
not to let him know that it was...

do you remember?

Rosebud!

Yes, Rosebud. R-O-S-E-B-U-D

I don't recall what all the acronym stood for,

but when he was born, the story goes, everyone proposed a middle name,

And no one could agree.

So Dick and Mary took the initials of each one and came up with R-O-S-E-B-U-D.

"Rosebud."

The High Priest of the Temple in Jerusalem was told by the archangel

that his wife, in her old age, was to have a child,

a son whose name is to be John.

But no one in Zechariah's family had ever been named John.

You remember Zechariah didn't believe

and so was made mute until the baby was born.

Well, when an angel zaps you, you begin to believe, and accept God's plan.

What's in a name?

Have you searched your?

Erb, for example (not, sadly, my real last name - that's another story), but

Erb in its German forms means inheritance or heir.

Edward, from the English King Edward the Confessor, means kingdom.

So, as a faithful Christian, "Inheriting the Kingdom" is something I've held dear.

But what about "John"?

Zechariah was named after the prophet

his name means, "remembered by Yahweh, God."

John means, "Yahweh shows favor," or "Yahweh is gracious."

Alan Culpepper of the Candler School of Theology at Emory University

thinks about us as Zechariahs.

"Here is a story of a priest who was praying fervently but who was not prepared for his prayers to be answered... The scene challenges us to trust in God expectantly and to be prepared for God's response to our needs."

(I remind us of the difference even at Christmas between wants and needs.)

Culpepper continues,

"We go through the motions of prayer and worship, but we hardly expect to meet God in the midst of our daily activities."

This Sunday before Christmas, Culpepper asks and I affirm his challenge:

"Can we see in the birth of a child God's continuing affirmation of hope for the world in which we live?"

New Interpreter's Bible, vol. IX p.49

I'll leave it at that.

And remind us that today's name is John, "God is gracious."

Important for us of Grace Church to proclaim.

"His name is John:

God is gracious!"

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 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...

Almighty God, by whose providence your servant John the Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of your Son our Savior by preaching repentance: Make us so to follow his teaching and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and, following his example, constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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 Great Fore-runner of the Morn”

R. Vaughan Williams, from *The First Nowell*