

Help is On The Way

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year C: Advent 2

Philippians 1:3-11

³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Luke 3:1-6 ¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, 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, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is 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.

⁵Every 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;

⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”

In this Advent Season, we look towards God's salvation. God enters our human life with the incarnation of Jesus at a certain time and place. This is not a distant God. God promises to send help to God's people. We too, can participate in bringing people the help they need.

God's grace and peace and salvation be with us this day! Amen.

Help is on the way. Yes, I say, help is on the way! What person, or animal or group does not want to hear, that help is on the way. Every single one of us, if we are in any kind of distress longs to hear, that help is coming.

John the Baptist is God's prophet. He is sent to tell the people that God's salvation is coming. But in 2021, we who've been in church for years having gone through oh, so many Advent seasons might think, 'we know all about John. He's the guy with the long hair who eats locusts.'

Yet today's text tells us to look closer. It begins listing all the A-game politicians and religious leaders: Emperor Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysanias, Annas and Caiaphas. These men lived all the way from Rome to Jerusalem. But where did the word of God arrive? The Word of God came to one lone man in the wilderness. No address, no fortress or palace, or temple. Just the wilderness.

Now the wilderness in Bible texts was known as a place of vulnerability and uncertainty. Remember Israel wandering in the wilderness? Jesus going into the wilderness? The wilderness represented spaces where questions were left hanging. Places where answers didn't come readily. For us today, people in boats fleeing their homes are in the 'wilderness.' The over 38,000 Larimer County residents who are food insecure represent what the Bible knew as "wilderness."
(<https://foodbanklarimer.org/hunger-in-larimer-county/>).

Yet, the Word of God, comes to John, in the wilderness. Then he goes into the surrounding area, the farms, the villages, the communities, to preach the news that help is on the way. God is coming. Salvation is near.

In the original text from Isaiah, that John quotes, the road home from Exile to the promised land was literally a long distance over difficult terrain. Nonetheless, the Lord tells John to use this text in preparing the people's hearts.

⁵Every 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;

Figuratively, God would smooth out the way, so that the people of God could get where they were going. That truly, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

You see, my brothers and sisters in Christ, we are promised each and every Advent that God enters human history. The God we worship is not a distant God. God comes, in real time, in flesh and blood to bring us hope and help and salvation through our repentance. This was John's message.

If you or I were standing in the crowd listening to John preach, our ears would perk up at this news.

‘Help is on the way? How can this be? We are living under the tyranny of Rome who taxes us beyond our means to pay. Is God really going to come? Has the Lord finally taken notice of us?’

Yes, people of God! Salvation is on the way. Amidst the wrapping and mailing of packages and the long lines in the stores, our salvation is on the way. Jesus has entered our time in history and will re-enter our hearts on Christmas Eve. This brings us hope! His birth brings us help as a world that faces wilderness desperation.

You might be grieving. You might be in transition. You might be sick. You are not alone. Think of all the children and youth who do not have a parent to hug at night because they’ve died of Covid. Think of all the migrants in boats who pay a ransom amount to get to safety only to capsize or must turn around. Remember the people of color, or the LGBTQUIA+ community who have been taunted and slandered. All of these people – you and I included - all of God’s children are longing to hear a message of hope and support.

When the word of God came to John in the wilderness, this prophet himself would come to know even more vulnerability and uncertainty. He landed in prison sending his disciples to ask Jesus, ‘Are you really the One? Are you truly the Son of God we’ve been waiting for to grant us salvation?’

Jesus says, ‘Go tell John, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk and blessed are is anyone who takes no offense at me.’ (Matthew 11:4-6)

Help is on the way.

You, people of God already know how offer help. Think of all the youth who will be so excited to receive the coat or game or gift card you’ve put out on the table in the narthex. Those kids will experience joy and warmth this Christmas. Perhaps they will lay in their beds at night and wonder who in the world would take the time to buy them a gift, when gifts are usually none or sparse? Or even worse, parents are in jail with no way to celebrate in person.

You understand, I know, God planned it this way. God planned that we God’s people come to the aid of those less fortunate than we. When we pray, ‘Your

Kingdom come,' we are telling God we too, will be co-creators in bringing salvation to all of God's children. The little ones, the hurt ones, the ones on the outside edges of society.

In El Alto, Bolivia, 12 year old Lorena struggles with her school work because her mother works long hours and is not at home to help. One day, Lorena and her mom happened to see a sign on the local church: *e Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Boliviana (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bolivia)*. *Sponsored in part by ELCA World Hunger, the church offered an after- school programs to help youth with the math, spelling and language materials if they were falling behind. These core subjects would help the youth achieve long-term stability as they entered the work force. Lorena found help at the center: help with her schoolwork, school supplies and spiritual guidance. Lorena says, "I must not tire of practicing the values I have learned in my life, knowing that I must love my neighbor as myself and that God has a purpose for me."*

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/LifeLines_FALL_2021.pdf?_ga=2.153394616.1238515102.1638679208-1378403560.1624998468

Recently, Pr Carlos led our class on the refugee crisis. Participants read real-life stories about how long the process is to be admitted to our country. How the effects of re-telling a story of persecution by gang lords or the government re-traumatizes the migrant or refugee. We learned that if any change happens in an individuals' life, such as the birth of a baby or a marriage, their paperwork is denied and the five-year process starts all over.

Now, members of this class are desiring to help refugees through Lutheran Family Services in Greeley. There is an urge to take very concrete steps to offer aid to newcomers in Northern Colorado. How can we as a congregation make the crooked and rough ways of a migrant's journey straighter, smoother and a tiny bit easier? So that, all flesh shall see God's salvation?

Because we know and understand our own vulnerable and uncertain spaces, we can identify with another in their broken places. Buying a coat is of fabulous comfort to a cold child. Truly. It's the best way to start.

And...Jesus didn't buy coats, he fed the hungry. He listened to their stories.

The Good News John proclaimed, is a Messiah was coming who would change people's living situations because He would walk alongside them. Rome would

continue to tax people. But Jesus offered a new way of life. That of love and caring, of giving and kindness through personal touch.

I'm going to challenge us this Advent. I challenge each household of King of Glory to buy one gift that is for someone you will never meet. Many of you have already done this with the gifts out on the table. Many more of us haven't done this yet.

ELCA World Hunger is a great resource for just those kinds of gifts. You can pick up a magazine or tree ornament and see what looks interesting. Give to HNS or Larimer County Food Bank for the hungry who live just streets beyond these walls. If your love is animals, respond to the commercials asking for help rescuing pets. God is pleased when all of creation receives our aid and comfort. Help is on the way, thanks be to God, and may we be the people who come alongside. Amen!