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AMDG

3 Advent A - December 15, 2019

This is *Gaudete* Sunday, Latin for “rejoice,” also known as Rose Sunday as you can see by all of our beautiful altar vestments. It’s the Sunday in the middle of Advent when we get a quick glimpse of the blessings coming for us at Christmas.

That’s why extraordinary blessings for God’s people are the theme in our readings today. Just a few of the wonderful things that are promised:

lame people leaping like deer

the blind receiving sight

the dead are raised

the poor are brought good news

streams in the desert

justice for the oppressed

and my favorite, strength for the fearful in heart

I can almost hear this list of blessings as a version of the “The Twelve Days of Christmas” ...eight lepers leaping, nine tyrants fleeing...”

Quite a song that would be...

And what is asked of us as we await all these wonders and miracles?

Keep our hope in God. Have patience. Don’t grumble. And open yourself to amazement.

Simple enough requests.

The writings of Matthew were written for the first century Jews who had been expelled from Israel and who had seen their temple destroyed and their way of life obliterated. Matthew is trying to convince them that Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of the prophets. So, it makes sense that Matthew focused on Jesus’ teachings on keeping up hope, being patient and being open to amazement.

And, it makes sense for us 20 centuries later that today’s lessons are about: Keeping our hope in the Lord. Having patience. Not grumbling.

And being open to amazement.

**Keeping our hope in the Lord** can be a challenge at any time of year.

Ideally, Advent would be the perfect time for hope. Longer nights allow

more time for contemplation. Beautiful lights remind us of God's light in the world. The Christ child will soon be born, and all God's promises will come true.

More realistically, Advent can really put us to the test. Millions of extra things to do. Relatives visiting. Travel. Stressing about money. Missing loved ones who aren't with us. For many, the holidays are a season to be endured. As Dickens so aptly put it, "abundance rejoices, while want is keenly felt." That want can come as not having enough to buy the gift you'd like to get your loved ones, or not having enough to eat. For many of us it's missing a loved one who has passed away. These deep holes of want can make the holidays almost of unbearable for some.

Keeping our hope in the Lord means, remembering that, even at our darkest times the love of God is there. It doesn't mean putting a happy face on it all and calling it good. In our grief and frustration, God weeps with us. It means not giving up before the miracle and clinging to God ever tighter. As the psalm reassures us, "God keeps his promise, forever."

We're also asked to **have patience.**

We are not much for patience, and our consumer culture certainly doesn't make much room for it. Instant gratification is the new world order. We can get our food fast, our Amazon orders in the mailbox tomorrow, our questions answered by Google or Alexa in milliseconds. This consumer culture makes us forget at times that wonderful things are worth waiting for – the birth of a child, the completion of big projects, a home-cooked meal.

And what about patience with ourselves - with how God is working in our lives? I know I get impatient when I make the same mistake over and over again. I have to remind myself that God's personal miracles for me are not coming via two-day air from Amazon. And that Google isn't going to answer the big questions in my heart. Being patient with God's plan for me, means accepting myself just as God accepts me, as I am right now.

**And directly connected with having patience is not grumbling.** Now there's a tall order for this time of year. Disappointment, frustration, sadness, impatience all take their toll and we often take it out on others –

grumbling and lashing out at a time of the year when we're supposed to be extending the joy of Christmas. So, a little self-discipline is a good spiritual exercise at this time. As we're reminded by Santa Claus - Don't pout, don't cry, don't shout. Bear the little frustrations and annoyances with humility, remembering that there are great things ahead that will make our complaints whither.

And finally, and most importantly, **be open to amazement**. Christmas is a time for amazement, it's the time when we are presented once more with the impossible – God made man. Our God born in a stable. To be truly open to amazement we have to set aside our expectations – of what we want Christ to be.

Poor John the Baptist, his prophetic life was coming to an end in a prison, and he wanted to know if Jesus was the one he had been preparing for. John told his followers the axe was lying at the root, ready to chop down the unworthy trees. The one to come would have a winnowing fork and clear the threshing floor. And he would burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. But Jesus didn't seem to be holding an axe; instead he was offering the hand of forgiveness. He wasn't throwing anything into the fire, rather he was healing the sick, reassuring the poor, welcoming strangers. John must have felt confused, if not disappointed.

We all have our own expectations of who we want Jesus to be. Maybe it's a Jesus who vindicates, or a Jesus who comforts but does not challenge, or a Jesus who champions our favorite cause.

But sooner or later, though, our expectations of who we want Jesus to be bumps up against the miracle of the true living God. Jesus – the real Jesus, the real Messiah – the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. And Jesus will ask, “Do you want to follow me or do you want to worship your idea of who I should be? Do you want the thrill and hope and challenge of a life lived in God's extravagant Love? Or merely the comfort of worshipping an idol of your own making?”

And so in these last days before Christmas, as we're given a glimmer of the wonders that await us...we hope...we are patient...we don't

grumble... and we stand ready to be amazed at what we will discover anew on that stable floor.

Let us pray. Dear God of wonder and miracles, God of Hope, God of Surprises. Open our hearts, illumine our minds, strengthen our bodies and souls, so that at the birth of your Son, we may ready to be amazed and completely overtaken by incredible gift that you want to be for us, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **The Collect**

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## **Old Testament**

### **Isaiah 35:1-10**

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;

like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the Lord,  
the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.

Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
"Be strong, do not fear!"

Here is your God.  
He will come with vengeance,

with terrible recompense.  
He will come and save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;

the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;

the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Holy Way;

the unclean shall not travel on it,  
but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;

they shall not be found there,  
but the redeemed shall walk there.

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;

everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

## **The Response**

## **Psalm 146:4-9**

Lauda, anima mea

4 Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help! \*  
whose hope is in the Lord their God;

5 Who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them; \*  
who keeps his promise for ever;

6 Who gives justice to those who are oppressed, \*  
and food to those who hunger.

7 The Lord sets the prisoners free;  
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind; \*  
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;

8 The Lord loves the righteous;  
the Lord cares for the stranger; \*  
he sustains the orphan and widow,  
but frustrates the way of the wicked.

9 The Lord shall reign for ever, \*  
your God, O Zion, throughout all generations.  
Hallelujah!

*or*

## **Canticle 15 Page 91, BCP**

### **The Song of Mary *Magnificat***

*Luke 1:46-55*

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.

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.*

## **The Epistle**

### **James 5:7-10**

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

## **The Gospel**

### **Matthew 11:2-11**

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then

did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.’

“Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist;  
yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”