

Midweek Advent Vespers 4
St. Luke 1:57-80
December 23rd, 2020
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

To Give Light to Those Who Sit in Darkness

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The season of Advent is often called “the season of St. John the Baptist,” because He goes before the Christ to prepare His way. Just like Advent prepares the way for our Lord’s Nativity, St. John the Baptist prepares the way for the coming of the Lord + Jesus Christ. The voice cries in the wilderness to make straight the way of the Lord, in order to prepare the way for the Word of God incarnate—our Lord + Jesus. Well, one may wonder why the Christ would need a forerunner at all. He is perfect His way is perfect. Why would He need someone to prepare His way? It is already perfect. Zacharias in the *Benedictus*, the canticle in the Office at Matins on Sundays in the season of Advent, prophesies the reason: because people sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

To the world a reminder of sin and death at this time is out of place. This is why the world rushes to put up Christmas decorations and blare “Christmas songs” over the loud speakers of every store and business, because they want to forget about sin and death. The world wants to skip over the penitential season of Advent. They want to get right to the joy. Sadly, many churches go along with the world and skip over this penitential season. The Church’s year reflects our lives. Our lives are filled with ups and downs. We have happy and sad times. The Church’s year reflects that with her rhythm of fasts and, feast and festivals.

Times of fasting bring to our minds that life is not always a “bed of roses.” We endure suffering, pain, sickness, death, loss of friends, broken relationships, unemployment, and the like. When the Church fasts, such as in this season of Advent, it reminds us that we are surrounded by sin and death. We do sit in darkness and the shadow of death. But even while we in the Church mourn over our sinfulness, we in the Church are also looking ahead to the feasts and festivals—the time of celebration in the Church.

The times of feasts and festivals bring to our mind that life can actually have happy moments. We enjoy the happy times of births and birthdays, of weddings and anniversaries. We enjoy the times where we have achieved some goal, such as an increase in pay at work, or a promotion, or even when we graduate from high school or college, or grad school. These are all happy times for which we are thankful to the Lord God for blessing us with these wonderful gifts. The Church’s year reminds us of the happy times whenever she celebrates her feasts and festivals. This is why the Church in her

thankfulness offers more church services for her people to gather together as the Body of Christ to receive His gifts and give thanks for all the good things that He has done for us. We need the times of fasting to remind us just how sweet the celebrations of the feasts and festivals truly are.

We are prepared for the days of feasts and festivals through the seasons of fasting. This reflects the rhythm of our very own lives, which endure ups and downs. These ups and downs can even occur for us on a daily basis. We are reminded daily of just how much of a poor, miserable sinner we are whenever we break the Law of God. We say something too harsh. We get angry with our fellowman. We curse. We are lazy and negligent. The Holy Ghost works on our hard hearts to remind us that these things are not pleasing to the Lord God. Daily do we sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. But on account of our faith in the words and promises of our Lord God, we know that through contrition, that is, sorrow over our sins, and faith we have forgiveness through the works and merits of our Lord + Jesus Christ. When we see our sinfulness, we are burdened by it, but when we hear that our sins are forgiven for the sake of the Christ, we are filled with joy and gladness.

The Holy Ghost prepares our sinful hearts in the midst of the darkness of sin and in the shadow of death by preaching into our ears the Law; that we are poor, miserable sinners who justly deserve the Lord God's eternal wrath and displeasure, and all temporal and eternal punishments. Having been brought into contrition through the Law our hearts are prepared to receive the pleasing Gospel of our Lord + Jesus Christ. This is why the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent come before the days of feasting in Christmas and Easter. Our hearts are prepared for the celebration by reminding us what our lost state is truly like, so that we rejoice even more when we hear of the good things that our Lord + Jesus has done for us.

Therefore, St. John the Baptist must prepare the way for the Christ. The voice must make straight the way of the Word of God incarnate, our Lord + Jesus Christ. The people of Israel sat in darkness and the shadow of death. There had been centuries pass since a prophet had been in Israel and proclaimed the works of the Messiah. The Jews had begun to interpret the scriptures that talked deliverance from their enemies to mean deliverance from their earthly enemies, specifically the Romans and foreigners that had invaded their land. But when the scriptures speak of the Messiah defeating Israel's enemies—when Zacharias prophesies about it in the *Benedictus*—it is speaking about rescue from spiritual enemies; the enemies of sin, death, and the power of the devil.

The Israelites sat in darkness and the shadow of death, because they had forgotten what poor, miserable sinners they were. St. John, the Forerunner, prepares the way of the Lord + Jesus by preaching repentance toward the forgiveness of sins. He baptized those who came to him in repentance with water; a symbolic washing signifying that they were clean. They were not only clean in their body from the water, but were also symbolically spiritually clean. Whereas St. John the Baptist baptized with water, the Lord + Jesus came and gave to His Bride, the Church, the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost through the waters of Holy Baptism.

This washing and renewal of the Holy Ghost which happened in our life at one time on one day, is something that we can carry with us throughout all our days of this life. The benefits of Holy Baptism are there for us whenever we in faith believe the words and promises declared in Holy Baptism; that we poor sinners have forgiveness through those holy waters. This is why throughout the times of fasting, of being reminded of our sinfulness, we can make the sign of the holy cross—the same sign that was made upon our foreheads and hearts at our baptisms—and remember that it is through the cross of our Lord + Jesus Christ that we have forgiveness, life and salvation. In all times of fasting—all times of sorrow, pain, sickness, death and loss—we can make the sign of the holy cross and remember that our Lord + Jesus Christ has come into the world to take upon Himself our flesh in order that He might redeem and save us from sin, death and the devil. We have forgiveness on account of His suffering and death on the cross for us. His death is our joy, for it means that He has rescued us from

death. His pain and suffering is our gladness, for it means that we will have eternal joy and gladness in Heaven.

We who daily sit in darkness and the shadow of death—who endure quite regularly the pain and sorrow of this life—are prepared for our Lord’s arrival. He comes to us with His wonderful works to fill us with joy and gladness. He is the Light of the world, which has come into the world to fill it with His marvelous light. He has defeated the powers of darkness—He has defeated sin and death—in order that all those who cling to Him in faith have light and life in Him alone.

Therefore, my dear friends, on this last day of the penitential season of Advent—this last day of the penitential fast—let us not look at our sins and troubles, but rather look with hope to the coming of our Lord in the flesh on the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. He comes to bring us out of darkness and death, and give to us eternal life in Heaven, where we will enjoy for all eternity the eternal Light of the Christ. St. John the Baptist has prepared the way of the Lord this Advent season, so that when our Lord + Jesus comes to us in our flesh, we can rejoice and sing, and worship Him with all joy and gladness. “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable,” for “the Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down.” In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!