



# ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

## Third Sunday of Advent

December 17, 2023



Ministers

Rector

Deacon

Senior Warden

Junior Warden

Minister of Music

Cantor

Administrative Assistant

The People of the Parish

The Rev. Christy Laborda Harris

The Rev. Kate Sefton

Jean Farmer

Meg Nalley

Miles McKenzie

Kristina Ibarra

Jun Kim

*Advent is a season of expectation and preparation, as the Church prepares to celebrate the coming (adventus) of Christ in his incarnation, and also looks ahead to his final advent as judge at the end of time. The readings and liturgies not only direct us towards Christ's birth, they also challenge the modern reluctance to confront the theme of divine judgement. Church decorations are simple and spare. Purple or blue are the traditional liturgical colors. In the northern hemisphere, the Advent season falls at the darkest time of the year, and the natural symbols of darkness and light are powerfully at work throughout Advent and Christmas. The lighting of candles on an Advent wreath was imported into Britain from northern Europe in the nineteenth century and is now a common practice. (Taken from the Church of England's "Common Worship")*

## The Gathering of the Community

PROCESSIONAL HYMN

Let All the Hills be Leveled

*please stand*

Let all the hills be leveled, the high-ways be made straight!

6  
See, our God comes; make ready every heart. Ready your

10  
heart! The glory of our God shall be revealed.

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In the tender mercy of our God, the dayspring from on high shall break upon us, to give light to those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

**Thanks be to God.**

Blessed are you, holy and living One.

**You come to your people and set them free.**

Loving Jesus: Protect and sustain us with your hand. Open the door of your love that, sealed with your wisdom, we may be free to serve you with joy. **Amen.** (*A prayer of St. Gertrude*)

## KYRIE

Lord, have mer-cy, Lord, have mer-cy, Christ, have  
mer - cy, Christ, have\_ mer - cy, Lord, have\_  
mer - cy, Lord, have\_ mer - cy,

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## The Liturgy of the Word

### THE COLLECT OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray.

Lord of light, who sent the Baptist to offer hope and face the world's scorn: open our ears to hear the cries from the margins, exposing our fears, inciting our vision and calling us to a step of faith; through Jesus Christ, the one who is to come. **Amen.**

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH (61:1-4, 8-11)

*please be seated*

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.  
They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.  
For I the Lord love justice,  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;  
I will faithfully give them their recompense,  
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.  
Their descendants shall be known among the nations,  
and their offspring among the peoples;  
all who see them shall acknowledge  
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.  
I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,  
my whole being shall exult in my God;  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.  
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,  
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

People **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM 126



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- 1 **When God restored the fortunes of *Zion*, \***  
**then were we like those who *dream*.**
  
- 2 **Then was our mouth filled with *laughter*, \***  
**and our tongue with shouts of *joy*.**
  
- 3 **Then they said among the *nations*, \***  
**“God has done great things for *them*.”**
  
- 4 **God has done great things for *us*, \***  
**and we are glad in-*deed*.**
  
- 5 **Restore our fortunes, O *God*, \***  
**like the watercourses of the *Negev*.**
  
- 6 **Those who sowed with *tears* \***  
**will reap with songs of *joy*.**
  
- 7 **Those who go out weeping, carrying the *seed*, \***  
**will come again with joy, shouldering their *sheaves*.**

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A READING FROM PAUL’S FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS (5:16-24)

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

People **Thanks be to God.**

GOPEL READING

John 1:6-8, 19-28

*please stand*

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

People **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The Gospel of the Lord.

People **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

SERMON

The Rev. Christy Laborda Harris

*please be seated*

*A period of silent reflection follows the sermon*



Come from heaven, Lord Jesus, with power and great glory.  
Lift us up to meet you,  
that with Stephen and all your saints and angels  
we may live and reign with you in your new creation.  
Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay;  
give new courage to your people,  
who trust in your love.  
By your coming, raise us to share in the joy of your kingdom  
on earth as in heaven,  
where you live and reign with the Father and the Spirit,  
one God for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

#### CONFESSIO

A voice cries out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.' So let us listen and turn to the Lord in penitence and faith.

**O promised Christ:  
We are a world at war.  
Our peace depends on your coming.  
We are a sinful people.  
Our pardon depends on your coming.  
We are full of good intentions but weak at keeping promises;  
our only hope of doing God's will is that you should come and help us do it.  
Lord Christ, Word made flesh,  
our world waits for your peace, for your pardon, and for your grace.  
Even so: Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.**

#### ABSOLUTION

Almighty God,  
who in Jesus Christ has given us  
a kingdom that cannot be destroyed,  
forgive you your sins,



open your eyes to God's truth,  
strengthen you to do God's will  
and give you the joy of God's kingdom,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

PEACE

His judgment is not vengeance, an eye for an eye; his peace is not false, a veil for injustice; he comes to break the spear, to silence the guns and still our warring souls. May the peace of Christ rule our world and heal our hearts. The peace of the Lord be always with you.  
**And also with you.**

*You are invited to pass the peace  
distanced and respectfully.*

### The Holy Communion

OFFERTORY SOLO

Ave Maria  
Franz Schubert

*please be seated*

OFFERTORY RESPONSE

If in Your Heart

*please stand*

**If in your heart you make a manger for his birth,  
Then God will once again become a child on earth.**

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EUCHARISTIC PRAYER—Steven Shakespeare

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give thanks and praise.**

Mystery of winter skies, we thank you in the darkening hour for opening our eyes to see your starlit beauty; for parting the wide heavens to send your gentle light; for offering your word to take our mortal flesh.

He was promised by those who shared your dream of peace; John the Baptist cleared his way with words of desert fire; Mary and Joseph accepted his coming with tenderness and faith; we know that he draws near again, to show us who we really are with honesty and love.

Now we take up the song of hope that we might awaken to his coming among us and the world be touched by the footfall of his glory:

Ho-ly, ho-ly, ho-ly God, God of pow'r and might,

9

hea-ven and earth are full of your glo-ry, Ho-san-na in the high-est.

16

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Ho-san -

21

-na, Ho-san - na, Ho-san-na in the high - est.

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We ask that your Holy Spirit will fall upon us and upon these gifts that these fragile, earthly things may be to us the body and blood of our lord and brother, Jesus Christ; who, on the night that he was betrayed, gathered with his faltering friends for a meal that tasted of freedom.

Calling them to his table, he took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and said: 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.' In the same way after supper, he took the cup, saying: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, to

remember me.' As on that night, so here and now he offers himself in touch and taste beyond all words can hold.

Great is the mystery of faith

**Christ has died**

**Christ is risen**

**Christ will come again.**

Therefore we come in memory and hope, responding to your call and the promise that echoes from the dawn of all time. May mind and heart be held by your self-giving love as we stand before the cross, approach the empty tomb, and praise the one whose name is lifted in your love.

Through him who was emptied to bear your fullness we make our prayer with all created life to the glory of the God who fills all in all now and forever. **Amen.**

As Jesus taught, we now pray.

**Our Father in heaven,**

**hallowed be your Name,**

**your kingdom come, your will be done,**

**on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those**

**who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial,**

**and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,**

**and the glory are yours,**

**now and for ever. Amen.**

## BREAKING OF THE BREAD

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;

**Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.**

The Gifts of God for the People of God.

Wherever you are on your journey of faith,

**You are welcome at this table.**

*All are welcome at the Lord's table. You are invited to come forward when the ushers indicate. Please extend your hands together to receive the bread. If you are gluten free, please let us know. If you prefer a blessing, please cross your arms across your chest. If you would like your bread intincted (dipped in the chalice) please let the clergy person with the bread know before the bread is handed to you. It will be intincted for you and handed to you. We are no longer able to allow you to intinct the bread yourself nor are we able to place it in your mouth. Alternately, you may sip directly from the chalice or choose to receive the bread only.*

COMMUNION HYMN                      76 On Jordan's Banks the Baptist's Cry

COMMUNION HYMN                      56 O come, O come Emmanuel (5-6)

POST COMMUNION PRAYER

*please stand*

**Eternal God,**

**we thank you that in Christ**

**you give yourself**

**into our hands:**

**may we who have tasted life proclaim the coming feast when many will come**

**from east and west, from north and south**

**to greet the Lord of all;**

**we ask this in his name.**

**Amen.**

BLESSING

May the God who brings heaven close to earth

give truth to our judgment

and flame to our longing

that our hearts might be ready

to be born again in love;  
and the blessing of God Almighty:  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be upon you and remain with you forever. **Amen.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CLOSING HYMN

Wait for the Lord

*please stand*

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are: "Wait for the Lord, whose day is near." The piano accompaniment starts with a bass clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The second system also has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!" The piano accompaniment continues with the same key signature and time signature. Both systems end with a double bar line and repeat dots.

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DISMISSAL

As we await our coming Savior, go in the peace of Christ.  
**Thanks be to God.**





