

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

With hope and expectation, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all who await God's day of restoration.

A brief silence.

Fill our mouths with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy as we bear witness to the great things you have done. Give your church a spirit of gladness as we gather and as we are sent. Merciful God,  
**receive our prayer.**

Let the trees of the field sing your praise. Protect forests, orchards, rainforests, and all wooded areas from disease and deforestation. Keep us grateful for their gifts of oxygen, food, shade, and shelter. Merciful God,  
**receive our prayer.**

You love justice and promise your favor to those who are oppressed, brokenhearted, and incarcerated. Grant wisdom and compassion to those who work for public safety and all who work within prisons, jails, and courts, that mercy may increase and violence wither away. Merciful God,  
**receive our prayer.**

Give us strength to pray for our world without ceasing and provoke us toward love and good deeds for all who are in need (*especially*). Provide for all without adequate housing, food, employment, or access to health care. Empower us as helpers and advocates. Merciful God,  
**receive our prayer.**

Open our hearts to those who serve as truth-tellers in our church and in our society. Bless leaders in church and society in their task of proclamation. Amplify voices of peacemakers, advocates, and especially those whose voices are ignored or marginalized. Merciful God,  
**receive our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

With gratitude we rejoice in the saints (*especially*) who witnessed to your life in all circumstances, in whom your Spirit was not quenched, even in death. Through them, teach us always to hold fast to what is good. Merciful God,  
**receive our prayer.**

Listen to these and all our prayers, O God of hosts, and restore us with your great and everlasting mercy.  
**Amen.**

## Preparing for Next Week

**Monday** Psalm 125. **Tuesday** Acts 3:17–4:4. **Wednesday** (commemoration of Katharina von Bora Luther, renewer of the church, 1552) Mark 9:9–13. **Thursday** Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26. **Friday** Hebrews 1:5–14. **Saturday** John 7:40–52. **Fourth Sunday of Advent** 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16; Luke 1:46b–55 or Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26; Romans 16:25–27; Luke 1:26–38 **OR Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Eve** Isaiah 9:2–7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11–14; Luke 2:1–14 [15–20].

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Tracks 1 and 2



# Celebrate

Third Sunday of Advent  
December 17, 2023

*"Rejoice always," begins the reading from 1 Thessalonians. Isaiah and the psalmist make clear that God is turning our mourning into laughter and shouts of joy. "All God's children got a robe," go the words of a spiritual. It is not so much a stately, formal, pressed outfit as it is a set of party clothes, clothes we are happy to wear. We receive that robe in baptism, and in worship we gather for a foretaste of God's party.*

## Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## First Reading

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

*Though the people had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, they continued to face hardship and oppression. In the language of the jubilee year described in Leviticus 25, the prophet, moved by the spirit of God, announces deliverance for those who are oppressed and comfort for those who mourn.*

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;  
<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the  
LORD's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of  
our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
<sup>3</sup>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.  
<sup>4</sup>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.  
<sup>8</sup>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.  
<sup>9</sup>Their descendants shall be known  
among the nations,  
and their offspring among the  
peoples;

continued



When the LORD restored the for-<sup>1</sup> tunes of Zion,  
then were we like<sup>1</sup> those who dream.

<sup>2</sup>**Then was our mouth filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with<sup>1</sup> shouts of joy.**

Then they said among the nations,  
“The LORD has done great<sup>1</sup> things for them.”

<sup>3</sup>The LORD has done great<sup>1</sup> things for us,  
and we are<sup>1</sup> glad indeed.

<sup>4</sup>**Restore our for-<sup>1</sup> tunes, O LORD,  
like the watercourses<sup>1</sup> of the Negeb. R**

<sup>5</sup>Those who<sup>1</sup> sowed with tears  
will reap with<sup>1</sup> songs of joy.

<sup>6</sup>**Those who go out weeping, carry-<sup>1</sup> ing the seed,  
will come again with joy, shoulder-<sup>1</sup> ing their sheaves. R**

or Luke 1:46b-55; refrain, Luke 1:52 [not printed]

First Reading, continued

all who see them shall acknowledge  
that they are a people whom the  
LORD has blessed.

<sup>10</sup>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.

<sup>11</sup>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.

## Second Reading

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

*Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians by encouraging them to live lives of continual joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. The closing blessing is grounded in the hope of Christ's coming.*

Rejoice always,<sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing,  
<sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances; for  
this is the will of God in Christ Jesus  
for you. <sup>19</sup>Do not quench the Spirit.  
<sup>20</sup>Do not despise the words of proph-  
ets, <sup>21</sup>but test everything; hold fast  
to what is good; <sup>22</sup>abstain from every  
form of evil.

<sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>The one who  
calls you is faithful, and he will do  
this.

## Gospel

John 1:6-8, 19-28

*John's gospel describes Jesus as the “light of the world.” John the Baptist is presented as a witness to Jesus, one who directs attention away from himself to Christ, the true light.*

There was a man sent from God, whose  
name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness  
to testify to the light, so that all might  
believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was  
not the light, but he came to testify to  
the light.

<sup>19</sup>This is the testimony given by  
John when the Jews sent priests and  
Levites from Jerusalem to ask him,  
“Who are you?” <sup>20</sup>He confessed and  
did not deny it, but confessed, “I am  
not the Messiah.” <sup>21</sup>And they asked  
him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He  
said, “I am not.” “Are you the proph-  
et?” He answered, “No.” <sup>22</sup>Then they  
said to him, “Who are you? Let us have

an answer for those who sent us. What  
do you say about yourself?” <sup>23</sup>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.

<sup>24</sup>Now they had been sent from the  
Pharisees. <sup>25</sup>They asked him, “Why  
then are you baptizing if you are nei-  
ther the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the  
prophet?” <sup>26</sup>John answered them, “I  
baptize with water. Among you stands  
one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup>the one  
who is coming after me; I am not wor-  
thy to untie the thong of his sandal.”  
<sup>28</sup>This took place in Bethany across  
the Jordan where John was baptizing.