

*Prepare the way
of the Lord*

LUKE 3:4

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

25 W. Springettsbury Ave., York, PA 17403

Church Office 717-843-8155

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www.stpaulsyork.org

www.stpaulspreschoolyork.com

Facebook: St. Paul's Lutheran Church York PA on Springettsbury & George

YouTube: St. Paul's Lutheran Church - South George St. York

WELCOME Thank you for being with us.

We are a Christian church within the Lutheran tradition (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) and we welcome people of all Christian traditions as well as people of other faiths and people of little or no faith. Christian worship has been offered to God in this congregation for 188 years. By worshipping with us today, you become part of that living tradition.

Offerings Offerings are received during the liturgy. They are presented along with gifts of bread and wine at the altar. You may also donate via our website at www.stpaulsyork.org or use the QR Code provided.



Restrooms are available in the Good Shepherd Room (Springettsbury lobby) and the narthex (George St). Baby changing stations are provided in these restrooms as well as in the nursery which is accessed through the double doors front right.

The Nursery is accessed through the front right double doors. The liturgy is live-streamed into the Nursery. Parents are asked to stay with their children. Quiet activities are also available in the Narthex for infant through preschool children to use with an adult.

Lutheran Church in York, PA - St. Paul's Lutheran...

stpaulsyork.org

An AED/Defibrillator unit is located in the Good Shepherd room. It is placed on the wall left side of the Springettsbury door exit.

Parents, please do accompany your child to the restroom during the liturgy and wait with them. This is a way for us to practice good safety protocol within our building.



*The altar flowers are presented to the Glory of God
in Thanksgiving of my husband Sammy Barnes by Kirsten Barnes*

The Flower sign up sheet is now open for 2025.

Please sign up on the sheet on the Springettsbury entrance bulletin board and fill out the sentiment sheet. One vase is \$35.00

STAFF		
Pastor	Rev. Stanley Reep	st.paulsyork@comcast.net
Youth Director	Kelly Moore-Spencer	kmoorespencer.stpaulsyork@comcast.net
Organist, Choir Director	Victor Fields	vfields.stpaulsyork@comcast.net
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Secretary	Patee Pizzirusso	st.paulsyork@comcast.net
Sexton	Ted Weikert	tweikert.stpaulsyork@gmail.com
Preschool Director	Deb Becker	director@stpaulspreschoolyork.com

Second Sunday of Advent
December 8, 2024
Holy Communion 8:00 & 10:30 AM
Musical Setting #5 Evangelical Lutheran Worship

PRELUDE

On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

David Dahl

Stand

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Silence for reflection and self-examination.

Most merciful God,

we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.

Amen

Almighty God, in his mercy, has given his Son to die for us and, for his sake, forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

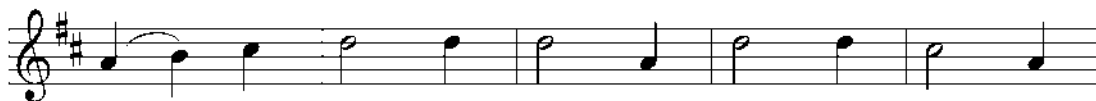
Amen

ENTRANCE HYMN

On Jordan's Banks the Baptist's Cry (ELW 249)



1 On Jor - dan's banks the Bap - tist's cry an - nounce - es
2 Then cleansed be ev - 'ry life from sin; make straight the
3 We hail you as our Sav - ior, Lord, our ref - uge
4 Stretch forth your hand, our health re - store, and make us
5 All praise to you, e - ter - nal Son, whose ad - vent



that the Lord is nigh; a - wake and hear - ken,
way for God with - in, and let us all our
and our great re - ward; with - out your grace we
rise to fall no more; oh, let your face up -
has our free - dom won, whom with the Fa - ther



for he brings glad tid - ings of the King of kings!
hearts pre - pare for Christ to come and en - ter there.
waste a - way like flow'rs that with - er and de - cay.
on us shine and fill the world with love di - vine.
we a - dore, and Ho - ly Spir - it, ev - er - more.

APOSTOLIC GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

KYRIE



In peace, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For the peace from a - bove, and for our sal - va - tion, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For the peace of the whole world, for the well - being of the church of God,



and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For this ho - ly house, and for all who of - fer here their wor - ship and praise,



let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



Help, save, comfort, and de - fend us, gra - cious Lord.



A - men.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. . . Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming give us strength in our conflicts and shed light on our path through the darkness of this world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Sit

10:30 AM CHILDREN'S ADVENT PROGRAM *A Poem and Two Carols*

Poem	<i>An Angel Came to Nazareth</i>	Anthony Knott
Carol	<i>Mary's Song</i>	Kathleen Tunseth
Carol	<i>Venezuelan Folk Carol, La Jornada</i>	arr: Bruce Trinkley

FIRST READING

Malachi 3:1-4

back page

PSALMODY

Refrain sung by all, verses sung by Cantor/Choir

Refrain

In the ten - der com - pas - sion of our God the
dawn from on high shall break up - on us.

1 Blessed are you, Lord, the God of Israel,
2 You have raised up for us a might - y Savior,
3 Through your holy prophets, you promised of old to save us from our enemies,
4 to show mercy to our forebears,
5 This was the oath you swore to our fa - ther Abraham:
6 free to worship you without fear,
7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,
8 to give God's people knowledge of sal - vation
9 In the tender compassion of our God
10 to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,

1 you have come to your people and set them free.
 2 born of the house of your ser - vant David. *Refrain*
 3 from the hands of all who hate us,
 4 and to re - member your ho - ly covenant.
 5 to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
 6 holy and righteous before you, all the days of our life. *Refrain*
 7 for you will go before the Lord to pre - pare the way,
 8 by the for - give - ness of their sins.
 9 the dawn from on high shall break up - on us,
 10 and to guide our feet into the way of peace. *Refrain*

SECOND READING Philippians 1:3-11 *back page*

Stand

VERSE

Sung by all

Al-le-lu - ia, al - le-lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.
Repeat alleluia
 Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of e - ter - nal life.

HOLY GOSPEL

Luke 3:1-6

back page

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke

Glory to you, O Lord.

At the conclusion of the Gospel.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sit

SERMON

Pastor Reep

NICENE CREED

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
 maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
 eternally begotten of the Father,
 God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
 begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.**

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.

He has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

A brief silence.

Almighty and merciful Father, kindle a fire for sharing the gospel among all the baptized.

We pray especially for bishops, pastors, and deacons. Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

Steer us from habits that harm what you have made, and guide us in practices that preserve and restore creatures and habitats. Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

Strengthen organizations and communities that work for peace and care for refugees, immigrants, and all caught in the center of conflict (*especially*). Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

Heal all who are suffering (*especially*). Provide comfort and strength, and nurture wholeness for the future. Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

Enrich our Christmas preparations, and bless the efforts by worship committees, music ensembles, staff, clergy, and lay leaders as they work during this holy season. Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We remember those who have died and rest in you. Guide us in deep gratitude for their life, and allow us to learn from their faithful witness. Gather us with them at the last to share in your mercy. Lord, in your mercy,
receive our prayer.

Savior of the nations, come, and receive these prayers and the pleas of our hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.**

The ministers and congregation greet one another in the name of the Lord.

Sit

OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS

8:00 AM Organ

Praise to the Almighty God

J. S. Bach

10:30 AM Chancel Choir

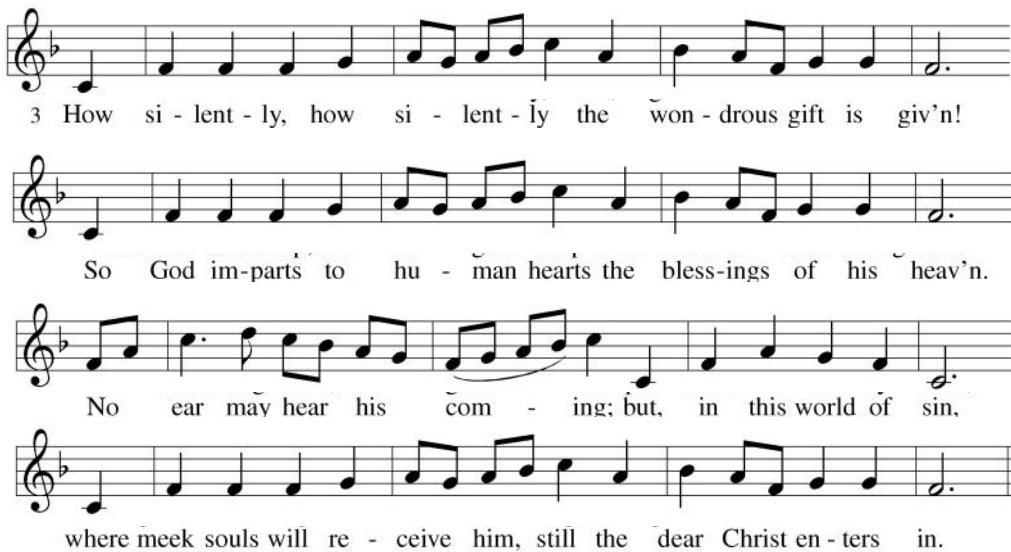
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Taylor Scott Davis

Stand

OFFERTORY

O Little Town of Bethlehem Stanza 3



3 How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly the won - drous gift is giv'n!

So God im-parts to hu - man hearts the bless-ings of his heav'n.

No ear may hear his com - ing; but, in this world of sin,

where meek souls will re - ceive him, still the dear Christ en - ters in.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray. Merciful Father,

we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us—our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

DIALOGUE

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 our thanks and praise.

THANKSGIVING

We give you thanks, Father, through Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, whom you sent in this end of the ages to save and redeem us and to proclaim to us your will.
He is your Word, inseparable from you.
Through him you created all things, and in him you take delight.
He is your Word, sent from heaven to a virgin's womb.
He there took on our nature and our lot and was shown forth as your Son, born of the Holy Spirit and of the virgin Mary.
It is he, our Lord Jesus, who fulfilled all your will and won for you a holy people; he stretched out his hands in suffering in order to free from suffering those who trust you.
It is he who, handed over to a death he freely accepted, in order to destroy death, to break the bonds of the evil one, to crush hell underfoot, to give light to the righteous, to establish his covenant, and to show forth the resurrection, taking bread and giving thanks to you, said:
Take and eat; this is my body, broken for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.
In the same way he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This is my blood poured out for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.
Remembering, then, his death and resurrection, we lift this bread and cup before you, giving you thanks that you have made us worthy to stand before you and to serve you as your priestly people.
And we ask you:
Send your Spirit upon these gifts of your Church;
gather into one all who share this bread and wine;
fill us with your Holy Spirit to establish our faith in truth,
that we may praise and glorify you through your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him all glory and honor are yours, Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church both now and forever. **Amen**
Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen**

FRACTION RITE *a brief silence is kept*

Sit

COMMUNION OF THE FAITHFUL

Holy Communion at St. Paul's Church is "open" to all believers who trust that the Risen Christ is present for his people in the Holy Eucharist.

Procedure for receiving Communion:

- 1. Come to communion using the center aisle.*
- 2. Take a communion glass from the tray of glasses.*
- 3. Take your place along the chancel step.*
- 4. The ministers will bring the host and wine to you.*
- 5. Place the used cup in an empty tray located on a credence table at the side aisle.*
- 6. Return to your pew using the side aisle.*

COMMUNION HYMN *Prepare the Royal Highway (ELW 264)*



1 Pre - pare the roy - al high - way; the King of kings is near!
2 God's peo - ple, see him com - ing: your own e - ter - nal king!
3 Then fling the gates wide o - pen to greet your prom - ised king!
4 His is no earth - ly king - dom; it comes from heav'n a - bove.



Let ev - 'ry hill and val - ley a lev - el road ap - pear!
Palm branch - es strew be - fore him! Spread gar - ments! Shout and sing!
Your king, yet ev - 'ry na - tion its trib - ute too may bring.
His rule is peace and free - dom and jus - tice, truth, and love.



Then greet the King of glo - ry, fore - told in sa - cred sto - ry:
God's prom - ise will not fail you! No more shall doubt as - sail you!
All lands will bow be - fore him; their voic - es join your sing - ing:
So let your praise be sound - ing for kind - ness so a - bound - ing:



Ho - san - na to the Lord, for he ful - fills God's word!

Wait for the Lord (ELW 262) Sung unaccompanied
The hymn is repeated until all have communed

The image shows a musical score for the hymn 'Wait for the Lord'. It consists of two systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The first system has the lyrics 'Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.' and ends with a double bar line and a sharp sign. The second system has the lyrics 'Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!' and ends with a double bar line and a sharp sign. The music is written in a simple, unaccompanied style.

Stand

POST-COMMUNION BLESSING

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.
Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Let us pray. Almighty God, in the Eucharist you cleanse us from our sins and prepare us for the coming of your Son. Make us ready always to welcome Him into our hearts as we receive you Holy Sacrament; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

BLESSING

Almighty God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Bless you now and forever. **Amen**

HYMN ***All Earth is Hopeful (ELW 266) (next page)***

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE *The King of Glory Comes*

Aaron David Miller

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Hurricane Relief Offerings to help meet needs with Hurricane Helene and Milton should be placed in a special offering envelope and marked "Hurricane Relief". All donations will be given to the ELCA Donations for Disaster Response Fund.

All Earth Is Hopeful

Toda la tierra



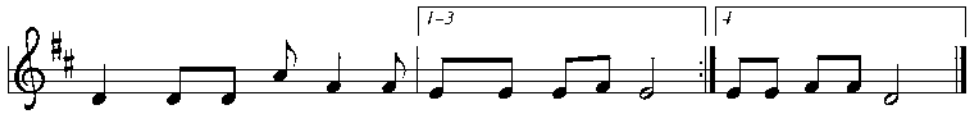
To - da la tie - rra es - pe - ra, al Sal - va - dor
 1 All earth is hope - ful, the Sav - ior comes at last!
 2 Peo - ple of Is - rael, you heard the proph - et tell:
 3 Moun - tains and val - leys will have to be pre - pared;
 4 We first saw Je - sus a ba - by in a crib.



y el sur - co, a - bier - to, la ob - ra del Se - ñor; es el
 Fur - rows lie o - pen for God's cre - a - tive task; this, the
 "A vir - gin moth - er will bear Em - man - u - el"; she con -
 new high - ways o - pened, new pro - to - cols de - clared. Al - most
 This same Lord Je - sus to - day has come to live in our



mun - do que lu - cha por la li - ber - tad, re -
 la - bor of peo - ple who strug - gle to see how
 ceived him, "God with us," our broth - er, whose birth re -
 here! God is near - ing, in beau - ty and grace! All
 world; he is pres - ent, in neigh - bors we see our



cla - ma jus - ti - cia y bus - ca la ver - dad, dar - nos li - ber - tad,
 God's truth and jus - tice set ev - 'ry - bod - y free.
 stores hope and cour - age to chil - dren of this earth.
 clear ev - 'ry gate - way, in haste, come out in haste!
 Je - sus is with us, and ev - er sets us free.

Text: Alberto Taulé, b. 1932; tr. Madeline Forell Marshall, b. 1946

Music: TODA LA TIERRA, Alberto Taulé

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Food Pantry Needs: Plastic and paper grocery bags. Peanut butter.

Monetary donations can be placed in a "special" envelope marked "Pantry".

Volunteers on: Tuesday (distribution day), Thursdays (food delivery days) and some Sundays (pantry stocking days) Contact Teresa Rohrbaugh, Patty Snyder, Ken Hinkle, or the church office (717-843-8155) with questions.

The "Pantry Grocery Cart" in the Good Shepherd Room is for bags and food donations only.

This Week at St. Paul's

Sunday, December 8, Advent 2

8:00 AM Holy Eucharist
 9:15 AM Sunday School for children
 10:30 AM Holy Eucharist— Live-Stream
 11:45 AM Second Sunday Sandwiches
 3:00 PM York College Holiday Choral Concert
 6:30 PM AA Meeting—Community Room

Monday, December 9

7:00 PM Finance Committee

Tuesday, December 10

Council Reports due to Secretary

9:30 AM Pantry
 6:00 PM Create—Preschool thru Grade 6

Wednesday, December 11

10:00 AM Preschool & Pastor—Nave
 10:30 AM Bible Study—Christ Hall
 6:00 PM Advent Dinner
 7:00 PM Advent Vespers

Thursday, December 12

6:00 PM English Class— Community Rm
 6:30 PM Handbell Choir
 7:30 PM Chancel Choir

Sunday, December 15, Advent 3

8:00 AM Holy Eucharist
 9:15 AM Sunday School for children
 10:30 AM Holy Eucharist— Live-Stream
 6:30 PM AA Meeting—Community Room



Wednesday

Advent Vespers

December 11, & 18

6:00 PM Dinner
 7:00 PM Vespers



Book Club meets at St. Paul's

January 16th 3:00-4:00 the Book Club will meet at the church to discuss *The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell* by Robert Dugoni. All are welcome!

Serving the Lord with Gladness

DATE	TIME	Assisting Minister	Crucifer	Lector	Live stream	Greeters	Ushers	Altar Guild
12/8	8:00 AM	Bob Reed	Denise Rider	Laura Livingston		Rose & Jeff Riese	Team 2E: Ron Riese, Kathy Monk, Ken Hinkle, Alex Bastian	Ron & Norma Riese
	10:30 AM	Aaron Jacobs	Jaclyn Kinkella	Allison Lehr	Christian Barnes	Gail Kerchner, Earline Jones	Team 2L: Kem Vaught, Gail Kerchner, Sandy Dickensheets	Janet Fitch & Deb Becker

A Poem and Two Carols

An Advent Program presented by the Children of St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Cast	Cast	Ensemble	Ensemble
Gwendolyn Bastian, Narrator Isabella Lehr, Angel Gwendolyn Lehr, Horse Caroline McComas, Ox Melanie Patterson, Camel	Frederick Jones, Donkey Jordyn Lehr, Soldier Exequiel Tracey, Good Samaritan Teddy Waddail, Wise Man Samantha Jacobs, Lady in Waiting (Mary)	Jane Berkey Iris Ericson Rylan Hake Colton Hake Hazel Jones	Sophia Lehr Ezra Ericson Naomi Patterson Noelle Wagner



Christmas Worship Schedule

Please note the alternate service times throughout the Christmas Season

Sunday December 22, Fourth Sunday of Advent

10:30 AM

Lessons and Carols with Holy Communion

Joy to the World

The Ringing in of Christmas

Organ, Chancel Choir

Tuesday, December 24, Christmas Eve - The Nativity of Our Lord

4:00 PM

The Holy Eucharist

Lighting of Hand Candles

Children's Choir, Cello Duet, Violin

7:00 PM

The Holy Eucharist

Lighting of Hand Candles

Handbells, Organ, Chancel Choir, Piano Duet, Violin, Brass

Wednesday, December 25, Christmas Day

10:30 AM

The Holy Eucharist

Sunday December 29, First Sunday after Christmas

10:30 AM

The Holy Eucharist with the Sacrament of Holy Baptism

Sunday January 5, Second Sunday after Christmas

9:15 AM

Pancake Breakfast (Men's Group Cooking)

10:30 AM

The Holy Eucharist

Jazz Quartet leading the liturgy

A ladder, a colorful coat, a bush on fire, a tambourine, and what appears to be a stubborn donkey, these are the images that bring back memories, for God's people. These are some of the images that grace the Jesse Tree in Christ Hall. The images recall the great lengths to which God will go in order to save and redeem his people. The connections are to Jesse and his family line. They tell of how God is at work making a way forward for his people.

Earlier this year, Miss Kelly and I led the children in an ornament making workshop while the women and men of the congregation gathered to reactivate a women's group and a men's group at St. Paul's. The children had fun gluing and coloring and adding decorations to their Joseph's coat of many colors and to their tambourines symbolizing the joy and song of Miriam after God's people were safely across the Red Sea.

Years ago, Miss Kelly and I did an Advent project with the children where they selected a story from the Jesse Tree collection and then turned it into a painting. One little girl, Mariah, I'm convinced never dreamt that her painting would remind anyone of Jacob's dream, a night of complete mystery with angels ascending and descending a ladder reaching from earth to heaven. And another little girl, Sarah, with her elaborate depiction of Joseph's coat of many colors, I'm not sure if her imagination could fathom the extent of jealousy that would spin such an elaborate plot against a younger brother. Or if the boy, Nicholas, sensed the heat given off from that bush that was burning but never consumed, the heat that Moses would feel from the people he was called to lead, people who were on the way to the Promised Land. And Damon, when he painted the face on a donkey, did he know something about God's blessing and deliverance. Did he know what the donkey could see and what Balaam could not?

The great thing about children and artwork is in the raw uncomplicated matter of fact way that they illustrate Bible stories. Of the five stories I have mentioned, Balaam's Donkey is probably the most unfamiliar. It's a good read, a donkey that can see the angel of God when no one else can. The donkey gets clobbered, really walloped when attempting to avoid potential calamity. But in the end the donkey is another sign of God's blessing.

In this second week in Advent I am aware of how quickly the days are passing. This season of hope is steadily speeding along. The Advent images and symbols can easily become only a blur. Loosing focus is all too common.

I don't know what, if anything slows you down or allows you the time to linger on the images of this season. Things that bring back memories for you, reminding you of your humanness and your connectedness to family, friendship, love, God. For you it may not be a ladder, a colorful coat, a bush on fire, a tambourine or a donkey. The images may be simple and ordinary or elaborate and grand.

A coffee mug with an angel painted on it,
The wind up music box that plays a Christmas carol,
An ornament purchased years ago on vacation,
A yuletide song by your favorite singer,

A verse of scripture,
The snow globe with Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus,
Grandma's china,
The stocking knit by a favorite aunt,

These are needed, not for sentimental reasons, but in order to slow us down, avoid the blur and to focus us on the one who is coming.

Sip coffee, tea or coca from the mug, aware of God's rich bounty of the Earth.

Turn the tiny music box crank and listen, in awe of its simple mechanics.

Gaze at the ornament, thankful for times of rest, recreation and refreshment.

Play a favorite tune from your play list, and experience the joy and peace music brings.

Contemplate that Bible verse, focusing on the oneness shared in Christ.

Shake the snow globe, watch it swirl, knowing that God replenishes the earth with rain and snow.

Enjoy a leisurely dinner on those dishes, with someone who might be alone.

Hang that stocking, thinking of the qualities that made the aunt your favorite.

And all the while know of your connectedness to the one in whom we hope, the one who is coming, the one who makes and keeps promises.

That's what John is proclaiming from the wilderness. There is one who is coming, get ready, make ready, take time to assess and ponder and prepare. John's call for a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins was all part of gaining a focus. Jesus the Christ is coming into the world. Do you see him? Look! There is the Lamb of God.

Isaiah's image was that of a straight path: valleys would be lifted, hills brought low, S turns eliminated and bumps rolled smooth. And with that complete, nothing would be blocking our view, we would all see the salvation of God. Christ Jesus would be as clear to us as was the angel of God to Balaam's donkey!

Christ is coming into the world. How do we receive John's words? Are we preparing to meet and encounter Christ Jesus? What does such a meeting look like? What kind of preparation is needed? Are our eyes open? Is our view blocked? Have we lost our focus because: of our pre-occupation with ourselves, of the pace of life, or of the lack of concern for others?

Week after week we gather. And week after week Christ comes, giving himself to us again and again, in Word's and water, bread and wine. Simple and ordinary, he comes speaking and washing and eating and drinking. These are signs of his gracious love. These are signs of his promise. These are signs given to forgive our sins and to provide focus for us so that our life is full and rich and connected. Don't lose focus.

This is a season brimming full of images and symbols. The ornaments suspended on the Jesse Tree in Christ Hall provide us with a rich sampling of those from Biblical faith. Those Old Testament stories of; a ladder, a colorful coat, a bush on fire, a tambourine, and a donkey convey in unique ways God's blessing and love for his people. God's blessing and love for us. There are other symbols surrounding us in daily life at work, at school, and at home. They can easily be rushed past, overlooked, and avoided. Or they can aid us in our Advent journey by joining with John in pointing us to Christ, our salvation, our fulfillment, our hope. Amen.

FIRST READING: Malachi 3:1-4

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; ³he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

or Baruch 5:1-9 [not printed]

Psalmody: Luke 1:68-79**SECOND READING: Philippians 1:3-11**

I 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.

GOSPEL: Luke 3:1-6

In 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."

Next Sunday's Readings: Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18.

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