

New Hope Lutheran Church

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December 5, 2021

The 2nd Sunday of Advent

Coming Events

Dec 7

11:30 Worship & Music **Zoom**

2:00 Finnish Bible Study **Finlandia-Impola Room**

Dec 8

10 – 1 Kahvi Time **Regent St.**

6:30 Council Meeting **Regent St.**

Dec 9

6:30 Finnish Bible Study **Zoom**

Dec 11

2:00 Caroling **Finlandia**

Dec 12

10:00 Finn. Worship Service † **Voima Hall**

2:00 Eng. Worship Service † **Regent St.**

In our prayers Ruth, Esme.

Remembering Toivo Mäkelä 91 yrs



Mighty, gracious, compassionate Lord, we pray today for the family of Toivo Mäkelä, that you would comfort them in their grief, guide them in their sorrow, and give them your peace. We pray this in the name of Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Lighting of Advent Candles



We praise you, O God, for this circle of light that marks our days of preparation for Christ's advent. As we light the candles on this wreath, kindle within us the fire of your Spirit, that we may be light shining in the darkness. Enlighten us with your grace, that we may welcome others as you have welcomed us. Grant this through Christ our Lord, whose coming is certain and whose day draws near. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn – Prepare the Royal Highway (264)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV-XqcmLqUg>

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming give to all the people of the world knowledge of your salvation, we pray through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Luke 1:68 – 79

⁶⁸ Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn^{la} of salvation for us in the house of his servant David

⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

⁷¹ salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—

⁷² to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶ And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

First Reading “Malachi 3:1 – 4”

1 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. **2** But 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; **3** he 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. **4** Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

Second Reading “Philippians 1:3 – 11”

3 I thank my God every time I remember you, **4** constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, **5** because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. **6** I 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. **7** It 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. **8** For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. **9** And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight **10** to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, **11** having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel “Luke 3:1 – 6”

Glory to you, O Lord.

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, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as 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. Every 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; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

*The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.***

Sermon

By Rev. Charles Nolting
"God's Messengers"

Have you ever found, when reading the Bible, that it is lacking in details that we might be interested in? What, for instance, was the colour of Jesus hair? Being Aramaic, it was probably dark, but how dark was it? Or how long was his beard? How tall or short was he? Those are the sort of details we often look for, but never find. And the reason we don't find such details is because we don't need them in order to grasp just how good the news is contained in the gospels.

What we find here with Luke however, is that Luke appears to really like including details! "*The fifteenth year of Emperor Tiberius. Pontius Pilate was governor. Herod was ruler of Galilee. During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.*" I know that these aren't the usual kinds of details we look for, but Luke includes them for a reason, and that is to place Jesus at a certain point in history. So rather than saying: "*a long time ago in a galaxy far, far, away...*", Luke is purposely staying away from vagueness, in order to point us to the exact time and place in history that these wonderous events took place. He wants to point out that this is not some sort of fairy tale, but an actual event.

Something else Luke likes to do is point out to us that the events surrounding the coming of Jesus was foretold by the prophets. He makes sure to tell us that the actions of John the Baptist were foretold by the prophet Isaiah no less, considered one of the greatest of prophets, which may be the reason Luke used that particular quote. As we heard in our first lesson, John was also foretold by the prophet Malachi, but it would seem that the words of Malachi may not have been as well respected as Isaiah.

Malachi was one of the last prophets to be heard from. By that time it appears that the prophets had said and done all they could on the basis of the inspiration they had received. After the time of the prophets, hundreds of years would pass before anyone even close to resembling a prophet showed up. So the appearance of John the Baptist explains his popularity with the people. Now here was a prophet! Finally!

If you go back in history, you may recall that many Israelites were taken in captivity to Babylon, something Isaiah (among others) had predicted, and after decades they returned, which was something else Isaiah had predicted. Upon their return,

there was an air of hope that things would improve, but it was not to be. Empire after empire kept controlling their country, worship had become pathetic (with crippled animals being offered for sacrifice), most priests were corrupt, and there was an overwhelming feeling that God had deserted the people.

It was into such a mess that Malachi attempted to be a messenger of God. It should be pointed out that the word "Malachi" was not a name, but rather a title, meaning; "my messenger". Yet as much as he attempted to change people's minds and hearts, he wasn't very successful, which may be the reason Luke didn't bother to reference his prophecy.

Malachi and prophets of his time did however, achieve a few things both then and now. Back then their words were influential in keeping the faith alive in smaller groups of people who held out for the promises of God to be kept at some point in the future. Such promises did a lot to enable the faith to survive what would be difficult times, even if it was on a small scale.

Today Malachi's message still resonates. The idea of one God and only one God, who watches over the world and expects decency more than anything else survived; as did the idea that when decency is missing and cruelties multiply, disastrous consequences follow. All of this means that the destiny of a people is determined by their sensitivity to right and wrong, and their instincts for building community rather than tearing it down.

Such a message is key for all of God's messengers. So who are God's messengers in our time? What do these messengers look like, and how can we tell who they are? It certainly has little to do with looks or lifestyle, as John the Baptist was something of a hermit living out in the wilderness, yet he definitely was recognized as a messenger of God. It would seem that what counts is the message itself. Does it reflect our loving, gracious God? Do the words send a message that calls for reflection on how our lives are being lived, and the opportunity to make changes?

It may surprise you to discover that we find such messages in conversations with people, in sermons, in devotionals, and books. Even unwanted illness or other trials in life have the ability to turn us even further towards God and reveal something about God we hadn't realized earlier in life. And in return, we ourselves can discover our own ability to be messengers of God. What messages has God sent you lately?

How have you been challenged? What or who brings you hope?

We need messengers and messages to confront us and push us to new places of growth. As an example, the pandemic we are currently in, while definitely not a pleasant experience, it has pushed our congregation into new ministries online. This has made our mission of spreading God's good news available to many more people, and in effect, preparing the way of the Lord. Each of us are invited to be messengers of hope, peace, and justice in our own ways. May God inspire us to these things, and bless our efforts. Amen.

Hymn – Freedom is Coming

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zt9Y7q3zv30>

Prayers

In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all people and places that yearn for God's presence.

You send messengers into the world to proclaim the day of your coming. Make our bishops, pastors, deacons, and lay preachers confident in their preaching, that their words and our lives witness to your grace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Send your Spirit to all living creatures that are endangered. Provide them with shelter and care, and bring us into right relationship with the earth that you create and call good. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Send leaders to our nations, cities, schools, and businesses to work on behalf of those who have lost parents, spouses, and loved ones; immigrants; the imprisoned; those living in poverty; and all who are oppressed. Make them bold in their commitments to justice and reconciliation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Send your servants to care for those who suffer. Use our ministries and our lives to reach out with compassion to those who are hungry, oppressed, lonely, or ill. Grant them healing and wholeness. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Send prophets to speak difficult truths, even when they are poorly received. Embolden those who ask hard questions and challenge accepted ways. Instill in youth and elders alike a passion for pointing to Jesus in all things. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We remember your saints, both those publicly celebrated and those more humbly remembered. Confident that your work will be completed, we live in faith until the day of your coming. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of new life, you come among us in the places we least expect. Receive these prayers and those of our hearts, in the name of Jesus, who taught us to 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 forever. **Amen.**

Hymn – Come Thou Long-expected Jesus (254)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIOY0dXQh9w>