

SERVICE INFORMATION: DECEMBER 17, 2023
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
SUNDAY SERVICE & SERMON
Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church

PRELUDE: Carol Gustafson

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 126

PASTOR: When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion,

ALL: We were like men who dreamed.

PASTOR: Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy.

ALL: Then it was said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."

PASTOR: The LORD has done great things for us,

ALL: And we are filled with joy.

PASTOR: Restore our fortunes, O LORD,

ALL: like streams in the Negev.

PASTOR: Those who sow in tears

ALL: Will reap with songs of joy.

PASTOR: He who goes out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,

ALL: Will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with him.

HYMN #4 "Rejoice, All Ye Believers"

CONFESSION OF SIN: *Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess to You that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. Therefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy and ask You for Christ's sake, grant us forgiveness of all our sins, and by Your Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of You and of Your will and true obedience to Your Word, to the end that by Your grace we may come to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

PRAYER

THE 3RD ADVENT CANDLE READING

READER: Jacob O'Flanagan

EPISTLE LESSON: *1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt. 21 Test everything. Hold on to the good. 22 Avoid every kind of evil. 23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*

GOSPEL LESSON: *John 1:6-8; 19-28 There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light...19 Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. 20 He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." 21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." 22 Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" 24 Now some Pharisees who had been sent 25 questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. 27 He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." 28 This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.
CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is not, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER FOR OFFERING

PRAISE SONGS: songs chosen by Carol

SERMON TITLE: "REJOICE"

Isaiah 61:10-11; Pastor Tom Olson; December 17, 2023

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

PRESCHOOL: At our preschool Christmas program last Friday, Mrs. Ladendorf introduced the children by pointing to them and saying to the packed audience something like this: "I would like to tell you what this is in one word: JOY!" I think some of the hard times that she and her family have gone through this year with her husband's poor health and long hospitalization has made her feel,

more than ever, the great joy of being able to work with the children. There is no earthly wealth that can compare with teaching children in a Christian pre-school where Christ is at the center.

PINK: Today is the Sunday of the pink candle. It is the Sunday to momentarily stop the preparations of Advent and sit back and rejoice in the thought of celebrating the birth of our Savior. Advent is a time of repentance but the third Sunday is a "joy break." So, we focus on a foundation pillar of our spiritual strength...the joy of the Lord. Let us "REJOICE!" First of all...

I. REJOICE IN THE LORD

Isaiah 61:10a I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.

DEEP: The over-riding spirit in a healthy and powerful and mature Christian is JOY. I am not talking about a shallow happiness from materialism or earthly success. I am talking about the deep and unstoppable "joy of the Lord" that flows like a river from the depths of our redeemed souls.

ROCK: In the dry and barren wilderness of Sinai, the children of Israel drank refreshing water from the rock that followed them. 1 Corinthians 10:4 tells us that *the rock was Christ*. Jesus said in *John 7:37&38 ... "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

SOUL: Isaiah said "...my soul rejoices in my God." Note how personal this is. His MIND rejoices in God, his WILL rejoices in

God and his EMOTIONS rejoice in God. It reminds me of J.S. Bach's classic piece, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring."

EVIDENCE: Evidence that you have received the new birth and are converted to Christ is that you have received ***"the joy of salvation."*** King David lost that joy when he committed adultery and murder and it did not return until he repented of his sin. He asked God to ***"restore to him the joy of salvation."*** (Psalm 51)

REMEMBER: Perhaps you can remember when you got converted to Christ and received the joy of salvation. I love to hear testimonies of salvation where people talk about the ***"wonderful change that was wrought in their lives when Jesus came into their hearts."*** Unconverted people at best are afraid of God and at worst hate God. But to us who are saved by Jesus' precious blood, shed on Calvary's cross...we have the JOY OF SALVATION.

TELL: It is our job as parents and grandparents to tell the next generation of all of the wonderful things that the Lord has done for us. We tell of his birth in the stable of Bethlehem as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. WE REJOICE IN THE LORD!

II. REJOICE IN YOUR SALVATION

Isaiah 61:10b For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

PRAYER: At our pre-school programs this week I had the privilege of leading the opening prayer. Each day I included a simple little prayer of salvation just in case someone in the audience desired to put their faith in Christ. Several people really appreciated that prayer and told me so.

BENEFITS: Notice here that when we have faith in Jesus as our Savior, he does many wonderful things for us:

- a. He clothes us with the garments of salvation
- b. He arrays us with the robe of righteousness. This is the restoration of the image of God to our souls.
- c. He makes something beautiful of our lives.

BEAUTIFUL: The child of God is compared to the splendid clothing of a priest and a bride, adorned with jewels. I have been told that everything for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem is ready at a place called "The Temple Institute." This includes a multi-million-dollar single pour gold minora and also the high priestly robe that is studded with priceless gem stones as specified in the Bible. This is a picture of the beauty that Christ gives us when we are forgiven and adopted into the family of God.

SALVATION: When you believe in Jesus as your Savior, God gives us a great salvation. Many of us are getting quite old and don't have much time left on earth. But with the assurance of salvation in Christ we can rejoice in the amazing adventure that lies ahead of us for all eternity. We REJOICE IN OUR SALVATION! And finally...

III. REJOICE IN THE PROMISING FUTURE

Isaiah 61:11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

HYMN: The theology of the incarnation of Christ is well summarized by one of the greatest theological hymns ever written, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." Verse three says, ***"...mild He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die. Born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give them second birth."***

COMMITTALS: One of the greatest duties of being a pastor is to officiate at the burial of a Christian at a cemetery. We have this service of committal because we believe that the remains that are being buried will rise from the dead on the last day. I say, "Out of the dust you came, Unto the dust you return and Out of the dust you shall rise again." Then I quote the words that Jesus told Martha at the tomb of her brother Lazarus in *John 11:25 "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."* Jesus said to Martha, "*Do you believe this?*" That is the important question today. That is why I included the prayer of salvation in the opening of our pre-school Christmas programs. This is the doorway to rejoicing in God.

SONG: Song writer, Billy Speer, puts it so well this way, "*Joy floods my soul for Jesus has saved me, Freed me from sin that long had enslaved me His precious blood, He came to redeem, Now I belong to Him; Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me, Not for the years of time alone, But for eternity.*"

SHOPPING: Sharon and I went shopping for Christmas together. We are at the point in our lives that we give practical gifts. I got her a pair of warm mittens to use with her snowmobile. And I had her buy me a new pair of long underwear for my winter activities... snowmobiling if she lets me use her shiny Polaris! That will bring us some fun times and temporary happiness.

GIFT: God gives us all a gift that will bring rivers of joy flowing from the depths of your soul. It is the gift of IMMANUEL: God with us; It is the gift of SALVATION: eternal life in heaven; and it is the gift of ETERNAL LIFE in heaven, our true home.

INVITATION: No matter what difficulty you are facing right now, REJOICE, Jesus is yours, the forgiveness of all your sins is freely offered to all who repent and believe and Jesus is preparing an eternal home for us in heaven. Focus on these things. Don't let

anyone or anything or any circumstance steal your joy. The pink candle reminds us to REJOICE! Amen

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

HYMN #34 "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice"

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 that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

HYMN #44 "Go Tell It on the Mountain"

POSTLUDE: Carol Gustafson