

ADVENT 2020 O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL



Isaiah 40 (NRSV)

1 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

3 A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

6 A voice says, 'Cry out!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever. 9 Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' 10 See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Come Thou long-expected Jesus

Charles Wesley

Come, Thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

Second Sunday of Advent Candle Lighting

Reader 1: In the book of Isaiah we read the words, "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God." God speaks and the word is an encouragement to His people. The word comes to those who feel that they are powerless and to those who are wearied and exhausted by all that they have endured. Many of us are feeling the same these days.

Reader 2: In the wilderness, John the Baptist proclaims that "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals." John's proclamation is accompanied by a command that echoes the words of the prophets: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Even in the wilderness, we are called to prepare so that we might see the presence of God renewed in our lives.

Reader 1: Today the words of Isaiah and John the Baptist remind us that there is work to be done to prepare the way of the Lord. Redemption is coming, but we need to make the way; we need to remove the obstacles that lie in the path of the coming Kingdom. We can clear the way for God to come and dwell with us.

Reader 2: We light these candles today as a sign of our faith that the God we worship is not far from us. We light these candles in faith, believing in the One who has come, the One who comes, and the One who is coming--the One whose arrival we commemorate, celebrate, and anticipate in this Advent season.

Both readers: O come, O come, Emmanuel.

The people: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Mark 1 (NRSV)

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”’,

4 John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.’

Luke 3 (NRSV)

1 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, 2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4 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. 5 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; 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

7 John said to the crowds that came out to be baptised by him, ‘You brood of vipers! **Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?** 8 Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 9 Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’

10 And the crowds asked him, ‘What then should we do?’ 11 In reply he said to them, ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’ 12 Even tax-collectors came to be baptised, and they asked him, “Teacher, what

should we do?’ 13 He said to them, ‘Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.’ 14 Soldiers also asked him, ‘And we, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.’

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16 John answered all of them by saying, ‘I baptise you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’

Somebody’s Coming (Mark 1)

- **Big news**
 - Mark and Luke and Isaiah
 - Com-fort: become strong, fortified
 - Not an escape route (see Luke 3:7, *who ‘told’ you to flee?*)
 - **Grass** and wind
 - “Prepare the way” is a command
 - What obstacles do we need to remove to prepare the Way of the Lord?
- **Big names**
 - A **grass-roots** movement
 - 5 rulers and two high priests, but the Word came to . . .
 - To lift up the lowly and bring down the powerful from their thrones (Mary, in Luke 1:52)
- The **big picture**
 - Ordinary, insignificant people like John the Baptist and Mary
 - Grunewald’s *Crucifixion*
 - Faith: a connection with something bigger than ourselves
 - *What good amid these, O me, O life?* (Walt Whitman, from *Leaves of Grass*)
 - You can contribute a verse
- **Somebody’s coming who’s going to change everything.**

