



LUTHERAN PORT ELIZABETH

FRIEDENSKIRCHE - CHURCH OF PEACE



2nd Advent

8th December 2024

Opening and Welcome

Grace and Peace to you from Him who is, who was and is to come, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Good morning, dear congregation! Welcome to our Sunday celebration today on the 2nd of Advent. How fragile this world is, how in need of a fundamental change. We suffer from experiencing violence and fear, we feel weariness in waiting. Where is God with his promise of another world? Have we reason to expect the dawn of his future? We light the second candle on the Advent wreath. It reminds us of the second coming of Jesus, his return at the end of time. It is a sign of hope in which we can face the future. And our watchword for today and this new week also encourages us: ***“Now when these things start to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*** Luke 21:28 Let us lift our heads and our voices by singing the opening hymn:

Opening Hymn LH 18, 1.2.5

1

Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!
Behold, the King of Glory waits;
The King of kings is drawing near,
The Saviour of the world is here.
Life and salvation He does bring,
Wherefore rejoice and gladly sing:
We praise Thee, Father, now,
Creator, wise art Thou!

2

A Helper just He comes to you,
His chariot is humility,
His kingly crown is holiness,
His sceptre, pity in distress,

Lift up your heads, ...

The end of all our woe He brings;
Wherefore the earth is glad and sings:
We praise Thee, Saviour, now,
Mighty in deed art Thou!

5

Redeemer, come! I open wide
My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!
Let me Thy inner presence feel,
Thy grace and love in me reveal;
Thy Holy Spirit guide us on
Until our glorious goal is won!
Eternal praise and fame
We offer to Thy name!

Confiteor

P. We are gathered here in the Name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

C. **Amen.**

P. Our help is in the Name of the Lord C: **who made heaven and earth.**

P. Having become impatient, we have forgotten how to wait for God. We have casually overlooked God's signs. We have followed our own discretion instead of paying attention to God's time and have relied on human strength rather than God's possibilities. That we may get beyond our presumptuousness - this is what we ask of God's grace:

C. **May Almighty God have mercy on us, may He forgive us our sin, and lead us to eternal life. Amen.**

P. God will judge the world with righteousness, and the nations with his truth. Psalm 96:13b
We may be assured that in His mercy God has turned to us in Jesus Christ, through

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whom the power of sin, fear and death has been overcome. We can live from his forgiveness. What has happened in the past should not weigh us down; What is coming in the future need not frighten us. God's grace gives confidence and joy to our lives.

C. Amen. Thanks be to God.

P. Let us pray to God with words from

Psalm 80,2.3b.5-6.15-16.19-20

P. Before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us.

C. Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

P. You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.

C. You have made us an object of derision to our neighbours, and our enemies mock us.

P. The root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself;

C. let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

P. Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.

C. Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

All. Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now and shall be forevermore. Amen.

Kyrie, Gloria

P. Kyrie eleison.

C. Lord, have mercy.

P. Christe eleison.

C. Christ have mercy.

P. Kyrie eleison.

C. Lord have mercy.

P. Glory be to God in the highest.

All. And on earth peace to all in whom he delights.

All glory be to God on high, who has our race befriended. To us no harm shall now come nigh, the strife at last is ended. God showeth his goodwill to men, and peace shall reign on earth again. O thank Him for His goodness.

Salutatio and Prayer

P. The Lord be with you.

C. And also with you.

P. Let us pray:

Almighty God, here we are, waiting with hope for your appearance. Sometimes we doubt whether it will ever happen. But you have promised it to us, and therefore we put our trust in your Promise. So, we wait and ask: do not stop working into our world. Make us firm in trust in your promise. Let us not hope in vain but make true what you have proclaimed through the ages: that our salvation is approaching. We ask you this through Jesus Christ, your Son, through whom you come very close to us. **C. Amen.**

Old Testament Reading

Prayer for Mercy

Isaiah 63:15-19

¹⁵Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The yearning of your heart and your compassion? They are withheld from me.



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¹⁶ For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name. ¹⁷ Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage. ¹⁸ Your holy people took possession for a little while; but now our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary. ¹⁹ We have long been like those whom you do not rule, like those not called by your name.

Hallelujah

Gradual Hymn LS. 736, 1-3

1

O Saviour rend the heavens wide,
come down, come down with mighty stride;
unlock the gates, the doors break down;
unbar the way to heaven's crown.

2

O morning star, o radiant sun,
when will our hearts behold your dawn?
O sun, arise; without your light
we grope in gloom and dark of night.

O Saviour rend the heavens wide

3

Sin's dreadful doom upon us lies;
grim death looms fierce before our eyes.
O, come lead us with mighty hand
from exile to our promised land.

Gospel Reading

The Coming of the Son of Man

Luke 21:25-33

C: Glory be to You, o Lord.

²⁵ There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

C: Grace be to Thee, o Christ.

Confession of Faith

Apostle's Creed

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 sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He will 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



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Hymn Sup 738, 1-3

1

The night is marching onwards,
the day cannot be far.
With songs of praise now welcome,
the bright and morning star.
And all who cried in darkness
sing too with joy again;
that morning star is shining
on all your fear and pain.

2

He who is served by angels
comes as a child to serve;
our God himself atones for
the justice we deserve.

The night is marching onwards, ...

No longer hide your faces,
you guilty and defiled,
for you will be delivered,
believing in this child.

3

Come quickly to the stable;
the night has almost gone.
There you will find salvation
foretold through ages long;
from human guilt's beginning
God heard you when you cried.
Now he whom God has chosen
stands with you at your side.

Sermon

The Ransomed shall return

Isaiah 35:3-10

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.

³ Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; ⁴ say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." ⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. ⁷ The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. ⁸ And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. ⁹ No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, ¹⁰ and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Lord, bless our speaking and hearing to your glory. Amen.

Dear Congregation!

The background or context of this beautiful text in Isaiah is that of the Jews returning to the Promised Land from Exile in Babylon. Depending on what route the Jewish returnees took, that journey was over 800 km as the crow flies, straight across a blazing desert. Or it was between 1600 and 2 500 km if they followed a more northerly route that kept them closer to water supplies and civilization. No matter how they went, it was a daunting journey for even the strongest men, let alone the weak and the disabled. The mere prospect of such a walk would give "feeble hands, weak knees, and a fearful heart" to even the most eager pilgrim.

I think most, if not all of us, can relate to being in a desert at some point in our lives. Some may have been sick for a long time or are chronically disabled. Others are far from home,



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alone in a foreign place, while still others have been wandering in a wilderness with scarce resources and nowhere to go for help. All of these people have “sorrow and sighing” in their hearts and on their lips.

For all of these people and for us, Isaiah 35 offers a beautiful picture of hope and joy. At the heart of it is the **simple promise of verse 4, “Your God will come... to save you.”** That’s the message of Advent every year, and Isaiah 35 gives that promise a particular colour and texture and flavour. When your God comes to save you, he will transform your desert into a garden and create a highway from exile to home.

When you are going through a desert experience, it is almost impossible to imagine what hope looks like. The poet prophet uses lovely pictures to stimulate our imagination. Imagine the desert itself rejoicing because its once barren landscape has burst into life: a carpet of colourful flowers covers the ground, the soaring cedars of Lebanon and the mighty oaks of Carmel replace the scrub brush, and the roses of Sharon dot the formerly colourless ground. In this impossible transformation, the glory and splendour of God himself will be displayed. As the heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands (Psalm 19), the transformed desert is a testimony to the power and grace of God.

The prophet now uses this spectacular transformation to encourage those with feeble hands, shaking knees, and fearful hearts. “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come....” The next words may strike some of us all wrong: “he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.” In a day when we emphasize grace for all, this seems out of step with the gospel.

But our reaction may reveal our privileged lives. Most of us have not been ravaged, robbed, raped, and kidnapped as the Jews in our text had been. For those who cower in exile or trudge through a desert, **the promise that God will make it right is a comforting word.** We shouldn’t read “vengeance” and “divine retribution” as acts of angry revenge, but as the action of a just God making the wrong right. Victims can only hope that will happen one day. Isaiah says it will.

What’s more, the coming of God to save will bring health to those who have lived with disabilities and disease: “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute shout for joy.” Some scholars take this in a spiritual sense; those who are deaf to the gospel and unable to move toward God will be enabled by grace to repent and believe. That may be, but it is surely not accidental that when God came to save his people in the person of Jesus, Jesus did physically heal people. That wasn’t incidental to his ministry; it was a tangible sign that the day spoken of by Isaiah 35 had come. Indeed, Jesus himself quoted these very verses when John the Baptist asked if Jesus really the Messiah was (Luke 7:22).

One can imagine the Exiles asking, “But how can we get there from here?” It’s a question we all ask when we can’t see a way through our troubles and the Enemy sows despair by whispering yet another lie, “You can’t get there from here. You’re stuck, you’re lost, there’s no hope for you.” Don’t listen to the hopeless one, says the prophet, because “a highway will



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be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness.” That title might point to the qualifications for those who would travel this road. “The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way.” This is the highway that only “the redeemed and the ransomed of the Lord” will walk.

But those words also point to the fact that this road has been constructed by the Holy One of Israel, who will redeem and “ransom captive Israel.” This is a limited access highway, but **you don’t gain access by being good. You get on the highway to heaven by being saved by a Good God.** It is the Way of Grace that one can walk by trusting him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

How can we get home from our “distant country?” How can we survive and navigate our desert places? Only by trusting the One whom the demon possessed called, “The Holy One of God (Luke 4:34).” **We don’t have to pay a toll to get on the superhighway, because that price has been paid.** Not accidentally, Isaiah 40 says that it is the Lord himself who will travel this highway through the desert. He walked the Way of Holiness, for us and in our stead, in order to get us on it.

Isaiah 35 began with the desert shouting for joy, and it ends with the joy of the redeemed. Because their God has come to save them, “They will enter Zion with singing, everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.” What does this mean for us? It means that **the water of Holy Baptism breaks forth into our personal wildernesses.**

We’re not there yet, so Advent is a season of waiting, expectation, anticipation, especially for those who still have much sorrow and sighing. But this lovely picture in Isaiah 35 assures us that the God who came to save us will come again to transform our deserts and lead us home. “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

Amen.

Hymn after Sermon LH 2,1-4

1

O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

2

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go.

Refrain

O come, o come, Immanuel, ...

3

O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light.

Refrain

4

O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode.

Refrain



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Offertory Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for providing for us day by day and for all the blessings you bestow on us. Please accept these humble gifts that we bring to your glory. Bless them for the furtherance of your Kingdom among us and around us, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

C. Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise Him o creatures, here below; praise Him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Prayer of the Church

Maranatha is often translated as "Come, Lord" or "Our Lord, come." Its roots can be traced to the Aramaic words maran, meaning "Lord," and atha, meaning "come." Paul used this Aramaic term to say, "Come, Lord!"

Lord Jesus Christ, we are waiting for you with longing. Full of impatience, we are looking for you.
Full of hope we cry: ***Maranatha , Come, Lord Jesus!***

We pray for all those who are waiting for your judgment: for the women who are being violated; for the children who are mistreated and abused; for all those who are exploited and oppressed; for all those who are wronged.

Full of hope we cry: ***Maranatha , Come, Lord Jesus!***

We pray for all those who are waiting for your peace: for the people of Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan. For the hostages who are still in the hands of terrorists. For all soldiers who risk their lives to secure peace. We pray to you for the people in whose families there is strife. For all those who are inwardly driven by hatred and fear and pain, who cannot find inner peace; and for those who struggle for peace and reconciliation.

Full of hope we cry: ***Maranatha , Come, Lord Jesus!***

We pray for all those who are waiting for your healing: for the sick, at home and in the hospitals, and for all those who care for them; for all those who have received a serious diagnosis and are fighting for their lives; for those who care for loved ones at home and reach the limits of their strength. And we pray to you for all those whose suffering is unrecognized and invisible to others, whom no one cares for.

Full of hope we cry: ***Maranatha , Come, Lord Jesus!***

We pray for all those who are waiting for your love: for the children who have to grow up without love and warmth. For all those who feel lonely and abandoned. For those who mourn the loss of loved ones. For those who consider themselves unlovable. For all those who have lost the meaning of their lives.

Full of hope we cry: ***Maranatha , Come, Lord Jesus!***

We bring ourselves before you: our longing for you, our fear of what is to come; our hope for redemption and salvation. And we bring before you those who are close to our hearts and whom we want to bring to you.

Full of hope we cry: ***Maranatha , Come, Lord Jesus!***

Come to our aid, Lord, save and redeem us through your power and your love. **Amen.**



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We close our prayer with the words you taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed by 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.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For yours are the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Now and forever.
Amen.

Holy Communion

Closing Hymn Sup 738 4+5

4

Though night will still descend on
the guilt and pain we face,
yet now there travels with us
the star of God's own grace.
No darkness now can hold you,
His light is shining through,
from God's own face came blessing,
salvation came to you.

The Night is marching onwards, ...

5

God hides himself in darkness,
yet He the light has sent!
He guides the world in secret;
good gifts are His intent.
He who created all things
will save from sin's despair.
Trust here the Son as Saviour,
escape the judgment there.

Blessing

P. Depart in the Peace of the Lord

C. Thanks be to God.

P. Go in peace, love, and care for one another
in the name of Christ;
and may the blessing of God, the Father,
God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit
go with you all:
The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make His face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord look on you with favour
and give you Peace.

C: **Amen, amen, amen.**

