

Advent 3

December 14, 2025



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to be looked upon as a sinner, or to be one. For Christ dwells only in sinners. On this account he descended from heaven, where he dwelt among the righteous, to dwell among sinners. . . Besides, you will learn from him that just as he has received you so he has made your sins his own and has made his righteousness yours.

– Martin Luther –
(Letter to George Spenglein)

Isaiah 35: 1-10

Throughout his long prophecy warning God's people of impending judgment, Isaiah regularly reserves space for a word about the redemption and restoration that will follow God's judgment. Israel and Judah are not going to avoid the consequences of their idolatry, faithlessness, and injustice. But punishment and exile will not be God's last word to them. The redeemed shall return to Zion and be restored as God's beloved people. On that day the desert shall blossom. Life will be revealed in the midst of death. Mourning will turn to singing. Sorrow will turn to joy.

- *How is this encouraging news to those who are tired, worn out and need something to look forward to?*

When God returns to save his people, great changes will come upon the earth. The blind shall see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and rivers will flow in the desert. Abundant life will be the hallmark of this new day. A holy highway shall lead people back to the Living God. On that highway Isaiah promises that "no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray." In the new day that is coming, God's will will finally prevail once and for all.

- *How does Jesus' entry into the world mark the beginning of this new day?*

Psalms 146

"Do not put your trust in princes." That's more easily said than done. Despite our cynicism about politics, we can hardly help but set ourselves up with unrealistic expectations of our leaders. We want to trust in them. We want to have confidence in them, no matter how frequently that trust is betrayed or disappointed. The Psalmist reminds us that there is only one who is truly worthy of our trust. There is only one who can give us hope. The Lord, alone, is our help in times of trouble. The Lord, alone, will reign forever. All other kingdoms will perish. But the kingdom of God will endure.

- *What are reasonable expectations to have of political leaders? What are unreasonable expectations?*
- *How does our hope for the future kingdom shape how we live in this world?*

James 5: 7-11

The early church struggled with waiting. They expected Christ's return at any moment and as time passed they

became more confused and more concerned. Over time, the new life they were waiting for seemed further off and less real than the old life they had been living. The church faced a crisis of faith, and along with, a crisis of how to live with one another. In addition to becoming impatient with the Lord they became impatient with one another.

It's hard for us to wait, to be sure. Those who seem to be the most patient in the face of crisis have endured many trials in their lives. They have the benefit of hard earned wisdom on their side. James encouraged believers to be patient for the advent of the Lord. "Hang in there," he said, as they waited for Christ's return. Blessed are those who wait with endurance, who do not lose heart in the meantime. They will soon experience the Lord's compassion and mercy.

- *Why is it so often hard for us to wait?*
- *Are you more or less patient with people and situations in your life now than you were when you were younger? Why or why not?*

Matthew 11: 2-15

Even in prison, John the Baptist had started to hear about what Jesus was up to. Since Jesus was not being the Messiah in the way anyone thought he should be, John sought confirmation about his identity. He had thought Jesus was the one, but now he wasn't entirely sure. Calling upon the imagery from Isaiah, Jesus tells John's disciples to report what they have heard and seen. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk. Just as Isaiah had promised so long ago, the day of the Lord was dawning.

- *Does it seem strange to you that even John the Baptist was confused and uncertain about who Jesus was and what he was doing? What does that say about how much Jesus confounds our expectations?*

Jesus went on to speak to his own followers, explaining just who John the Baptist was. In no uncertain terms he declared that John was the promised Elijah, the one sent to prepare the way. But he also warned that the new kingdom would not meet the expectations they had formed based on earthly kingdoms. John was not a prince in a palace, dressed in soft robes. He lived in the wilderness, surrounded by hardship. The promised kingdom is, indeed, coming. But on the road to that kingdom there are no detours around the cross. The glory that is coming is on the other side of suffering.

- *Have you ever wondered why God didn't just establish his kingdom without the cross?*