

Three Poems for Worship

The 3rd Sunday of Advent, Year B, 11 December 2005
the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor
Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

“The Spirit of the Lord”

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

- 1 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
- 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD’S favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
- 3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
- 4 They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.
- 8 For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
- 9 Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.
- 10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
- 11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

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Not one word
can improve
Isaiah's poetry.
Not one word.
The flow;
the message
is perfect for
this Advent day.

The Spirit of the Lord
anoints
The Spirit of the Lord
brings
Good News,
brings
restoration to the brokenhearted
brings
liberty to captives
brings
freedom to those who are imprisoned

The Spirit of the Lord
proclaims
a year of favor
proclaims
a day of vengeance
a moment of comfort

Garland and oil,
mantles of praise,
and seeds of mighty oaks
will be your reward,
for from the seeds will majestically rise
the glory of the Lord.

So take heart,
dear Zion.
Your days of darkness
are nearly over
the shoot of Jesse is sprouting
the glory of the Lord is springing
behold,
the Lord, God, is coming
indeed,
the Lord, God, is already here!

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“Rejoice! Pray! Give Thanks!”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

²³May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Rushed and hurried
scatter the shoppers
lists in hand
wheeling into parking spaces
charging across thresholds of
motion sensor-ed electric gliding doors.

VISA, Master Card, Discover, American Express
all stand ordered
organized
at the ready
none revealing the tiny dirty secrets
hidden behind the hologram
of daily percentage rates
late payment fees
and penalties.

The masses blink ignorantly
at mechanical Santa's
and wiggling, singing fish
that join the chorus
paying tribute to a fictional reindeer.
The masses react with predictable stupidity
according to marketing masters
deafened by Muzak
blinded by signs that proclaim
“clearance” “half off” and “bargains galore!”
The masses know
no better;

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dolts and lemmings
blindly carrying on.

But to you and I
we know
it is not a holiday that is coming
it is not a season to be greeted.
We know
it is Christmas that is coming
the first day of twelve
when we will heed Paul's edict-
We will rejoice!
We will pray!
We will give thanks!
And we will sing!

At the Mass of Christ
a feast will be spread
and all the world will gather
to join in the celebration
to welcome the baby Jesus
to usher in a new age
the beginning
of a brand new world.

"True Light Is Coming"

John 1:6-9, 19-28

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said,

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"
as the prophet Isaiah said.

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²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Artificial illumination
just doesn't cut it.
Human made
incandescent
halogen
or long slender florescent
nearly make the grade
but in the end
each falls minutely short.

One would think
that the light of fire
the sun's billion
nuclear combustions
lending blue
to our skies
would yield light sufficient
to satisfy our hungry
yearning hearts.

But, lo-
None of this light
satisfies the longing
desire for
God's pure light.

"I am not the light" proclaimed
the prophet John.
John gives testimony
to the light.
John cries out in the wilderness
"Make straight

a highway for our God.”
The way
must be straight.
The way
must be smoothed.
The way
must be made
for the light that is yet to come.

No human is worthy
No person has earned
the privilege to even untie a sandal
of the One who is to come.

The Light is coming!
The Light is coming!
The Light of the world is coming!
The era of shadows will draw to a close.
The days of darkness are soon to cease.
The epoch of illumination will begin
the never ending time of revelation
the eternal time of knowing
when all the faithful will be enlightened
by the Light coming from our God
the Light we've come to know
as Jesus.

Behold -
The Light is coming!
The Light is coming!