

Third Sunday of Advent, December 17

The Collect: Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 read from the Modern English Version Bible

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to preserve those who mourn in Zion, to give to them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.

They shall build the old ruins; they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.

For I, the Lord, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; and I will faithfully give them their recompense and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them shall acknowledge them because they are the descendants whom the Lord has blessed.

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful 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 ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth her buds, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

The Word of the Lord

Psalm 126 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, * then were we like those who dream.

2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter, * and our tongue with shouts of joy.

3 Then they said among the nations, * "The Lord has done great things for them."

4 The Lord has done great things for us, * and we are glad indeed.

5 Restore our fortunes, O Lord, * like the watercourses of the Negev.

6 Those who sowed with tears * will reap with songs of joy.

7 Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, * will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 read from the New American Standard Bible

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

The Word of the Lord

Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28 read from the New Century Version Bible

There was a man named John who was sent by God. He came to tell people the truth about the Light so that through him all people could hear about the Light and believe. John was not the Light, but he came to tell people the truth about the Light.

Here is the truth John told when the leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?"

John spoke freely and did not refuse to answer. He said, "I am not the Christ."

So they asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”

He answered, “No, I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?” they asked.

He answered, “No.”

Then they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to tell those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

John told them in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“I am the voice of one calling out in the desert: ‘Make the road straight for the Lord.’”

Some Pharisees who had been sent asked John “If you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet, why do you baptize people?”

John answered, “I baptize with water, but there is one here with you that you don’t know about. He is the One who comes after me. I am not good enough to untie the strings of his sandals.”

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing people.

The Gospel of the Lord

The closing prayer: On December 19th we remember Lillian Hunt Trasher christian missionary in Egypt. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*

Lillian Hunt Trasher was born in 1887 in Brunswick, Georgia. Raised by her mother (who was originally a Quaker) as a Roman Catholic, Trasher joined the Church of God in 1912, in which she was ordained, and later became a member of the (Pentecostal) Assemblies of God. As a young woman, she worked at an orphanage in North Carolina, not knowing at the time that

her life's work would be devoted to caring for abandoned children.

In 1909, while engaged to a man she loved deeply, she heard the testimony of a missionary from India and she was aware at that moment that she could not be married. God had called her to service as a missionary. Not knowing where she would go, she opened her bible and read Acts 7:34: "I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee to Egypt."

In 1910, she arrived in Alexandria, Egypt, with her sister Jennie, and they found their way to the town of Asyut in Upper Egypt near the Nile. Shortly after arriving, Lillian was called to the bedside of a dying mother whose malnourished daughter was also near death. Though ordered by the mission directors to return the child to the village, Trasher refused to abandon her to poverty and certain death. In 1911, she rented a small house and some furniture and nursed the child back to health.

As she took in additional children, she had to rely on charity, though she eventually received aid from the newly-formed Assemblies of God in the United States. In 1916, she was able to purchase additional land. The buildings were built from bricks which Lillian and the older children made themselves. In 1919, she was ordered out of the country by the British government in the midst of political turmoil, and, when she returned, she took in widows and the blind in addition to children. Despite the Nazi invasion of Egypt and the subsequent violence of World War II, she kept her orphanage running. When she died, she had become known as the "Mother of the Nile" and had cared for nearly 25,000 Egyptian children. Her orphanage remains open today. Trasher died in Egypt on December 17th, 1961.

Let us pray: God, whose everlasting arms support the universe: We thank you for moving the heart of Lillian Trasher to heroic hospitality on behalf of orphaned children in great need, and we pray that we also may find our hearts awakened and our compassion stirred to care for your little ones, through the example of our Savior Jesus Christ and by the energy of your Holy Spirit, who broods over the world like a mother over her children; for they live and reign with you, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**