

Third Sunday of Advent, December 11, 2016

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 35: 1 – 10 read from the Lexham English Bible

Wilderness and dry land shall be glad, and desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus. It shall blossom abundantly, and it shall rejoice indeed with rejoicing and exulting. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They are the ones who shall see the glory of Yahweh, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands and make the staggering knees firm. Say to those who are hasty of heart, "Be strong; you must not fear! Look! your God will come with vengeance, with divine retribution. He is the one who will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened.

Then the lame shall leap like the deer, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing for joy, for waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. Her resting place is in a settlement of jackals; the grass shall become like reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not travel through it, but it is for them, he who walks on the way; and fools shall not wander about. No lion shall be there, and no ferocious wild beast shall go up it. It shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of Yahweh shall return, and they shall come to Zion with rejoicing. And everlasting joy shall be on their head; joy and gladness shall overtake them, and sorrow and sighing shall flee.

The Word of the Lord

The Gradual for today is Canticle 15 The Song of Mary, read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; * for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed: * the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him * in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm, * he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, * and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, * and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, * for he has remembered his promise of mercy, The promise he made to our fathers, * to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: * as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. **Amen.**

The Epistle James 5: 7 – 10 read from The Message Bible

Meanwhile, friends, wait patiently for the Master's Arrival. You see farmers do this all the time, waiting for their valuable crops to mature, patiently letting the rain do its slow but sure work. Be patient like that. Stay steady and strong. The Master could arrive at any time.

Friends, don't complain about each other. A far greater complaint could be lodged against you, you know. The Judge is standing just around the corner. Take the old prophets as your mentors. They put up with anything, went through everything, and never once quit, all the time honoring God. What a gift life is to those who stay the course! You've heard, of course, of Job's staying power, and you know how God brought it all together for him at the end.

The Word of the Lord

The Gospel: Matthew 11: 2 – 11 read from the Modern English Version Bible

Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said to Him, "Are You He who should come, or should we look for another?"

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight

and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Blessed is he who does not fall away because of Me.”

As they departed, Jesus began to say to the crowds concerning John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Look, I am sending My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.’

Truly I say to you, among those who are born of women, there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist. But he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The Gospel of the Lord

The Closing Prayer: On December 17th we remember Maria Stewart, Prophetic Witness

She was born Maria Miller, the child of free African-American parents in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1803. At the age of five Maria lost both parents and was sent to live with a minister and his family. She continued as a servant in that home until she was 15, without receiving any formal education. Between the ages of 15 and 20, Maria attended Sabbath School before church service on Sundays and developed a lifelong affinity for religious work.

On August 10th, 1826, Maria Miller was married to James W. Stewart, an independent shipping agent, by the Reverend Thomas Paul, pastor of the African-American Meeting House, in Boston, Massachusetts. Their marriage lasted only three years and produced no children; James Stewart died in 1829.

Maria Stewart was the first American woman to speak to a mixed audience of men, women, whites and blacks during the early 19th century. The first African-American woman to lecture about women's rights — Stewart focused particularly on the rights of black women, also religion, and social justice among black people. She was the first African-American woman to

make public anti-slavery speeches. One of the first African-American women to make public lectures for which there are still surviving copies, Stewart referred to her public lectures as "speeches" and not "sermons", despite their religious tone and frequent Biblical quotes. Stewart delivered her speeches in Boston, to organizations including the African-American Female Intelligence Society.

Stewart's public-speaking career lasted three years. She delivered her farewell lectures on September 21st, 1833, in the schoolroom of the African-American Meeting House, known then as the Belknap Street Church, and part of Boston's Black Heritage Trail. Upon leaving Boston, she moved to New York, where she published her collected works in 1835. She taught school and participated in the abolitionist movement. Stewart then moved to Baltimore and eventually to Washington, D.C., where she also taught school before becoming head matron of the Freedmen's Hospital and Asylum in Washington, which was the medical school of Howard University. She died at that hospital on December 17th, 1879.

Let us pray: God, in whose service alone is perfect freedom: We thank you for Maria Stewart, who witnessed that all are made in your image and likeness. Fill us, like her, with the perseverance to break every chain of enslavement that, by your Holy Spirit, your people may overcome bondage and ignorance; through the merits of Jesus Christ our redeemer, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**