

Third Sunday of Advent, December 17

The Collect and Psalm will be read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer. The Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel will be read from the New International Version Bible

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

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for 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 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendor.

4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.

8 “For I, the Lord, love justice;
I hate robbery and wrongdoing.
In my faithfulness I will reward my people
and make an everlasting covenant with them.
9 Their descendants will be known among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples.
All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a people the Lord has blessed.”

10 I delight greatly in the Lord;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

Psalm: Psalm 126 or Canticle 3

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.

Canticle 3

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.

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil.

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

25 Brothers and sisters, pray for us. 26 Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

19 Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. 20 He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

22 Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

24 Now the Pharisees who had been sent 25 questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

26 “I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. 27 He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

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

The Gospel of the Lord

On December 17 we celebrate the lives of William Lloyd Garrison, and Maria Stewart, Prophetic Witnesses. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*.

William Lloyd Garrison was born in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1805. His father, a sailor, had abandoned the family when he was five years old. His experience of poverty at a young age awakened in him a religious zeal for justice and a hatred for slavery. After working on a Quaker periodical in Baltimore, Garrison returned to Boston and, with the help of the black community, started his own antislavery paper, *The Liberator*.

His proclamation of purpose in the first issue became famous around the country: “On [the subject of slavery] I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm . . . but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present.”

The Liberator came to be the dominant voice in the abolitionist movement, demanding immediate emancipation without compensation to slave owners. Garrison invoked the ire and rage of people all over the country, particularly in slaveholding states. In 1835, an angry mob attacked Garrison, who was jailed for his own safety.

In what was a radical policy for the time, Garrison opened up his columns to black and female writers. Among those to respond to his call was Maria W. Stewart, a freeborn African American woman who showed up at his office in 1831 with several essays that were published in *The Liberator*.

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Stewart was orphaned at the age of five and grew up in the home of a white minister. She married James W. Stewart, a successful shipping outfitter, but was widowed just three years later. Soon after, she experienced a religious conversion and responded with her vigorous antislavery advocacy. Her efforts called upon African Americans in the south to rise up against slavery and for northern blacks to resist racial restrictions. In addition, Stewart was an early advocate for women's rights.

When her speaking career ended after three years, she became a schoolteacher and then Head Matron of Freedom's Hospital in Washington D.C., which was later to become Howard University. Stewart also spent the years after the Civil War organizing an Episcopal Sunday School, which taught basic literacy to more than 100 at a time in the District of Columbia.

Let us pray: God, in whose service alone is perfect freedom: We thank you for William Lloyd Garrison and Maria Stewart, who witnessed that all are made in your image and likeness. Fill us, like them, 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.**