

Third Sunday of Advent, December 14

The Collect and Psalms will be read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer
The Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel will be read from the New Century 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 35:1-10

The desert and dry land will become happy;
the desert will be glad and will produce flowers.

Like a flower, it will have many blooms.

It will show its happiness, as if it were shouting with joy.

It will be beautiful like the forest of Lebanon,
as beautiful as the hill of Carmel and the Plain of Sharon.

Everyone will see the glory of the Lord
and the splendor of our God.

3 Make the weak hands strong
and the weak knees steady.

4 Say to people who are frightened,
“Be strong. Don’t be afraid.

Look, your God will come,
and he will punish your enemies.

He will make them pay for the wrongs they did,
but he will save you.”

5 Then the blind people will see again,
and the deaf will hear.

6 Crippled people will jump like deer,
and those who can't talk now will shout with joy.

Water will flow in the desert,
and streams will flow in the dry land.

7 The burning desert will have pools of water,
and the dry ground will have springs.

Where wild dogs once lived,
grass and water plants will grow.

8 A road will be there;
this highway will be called "The Road to Being Holy."

Evil people will not be allowed to walk on that road;
only good people will walk on it.

No fools will go on it.

9 No lions will be there,
nor will dangerous animals be on that road.

They will not be found there.

That road will be for the people God saves;

10 the people the Lord has freed will return there.

They will enter Jerusalem with joy,
and their happiness will last forever.

Their gladness and joy will fill them completely,
and sorrow and sadness will go far away.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

Psalm: Psalm 146:4-9 or Canticle 3 or Canticle 15

Psalm 146

4 Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help! *
whose hope is in the Lord their God;

5 Who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them; *
who keeps his promise for ever;

6 Who gives justice to those who are oppressed, *

and food to those who hunger.

7 The Lord sets the prisoners free;

the Lord opens the eyes of the blind; *

the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;

8 The Lord loves the righteous;

the Lord cares for the stranger; *

he sustains the orphan and widow,

but frustrates the way of the wicked.

9 The Lord shall reign for ever, *

your God, O Zion, throughout all generations.

Hallelujah!

Or Canticle 3

My soul doth magnify the Lord, *

and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.

For he hath regarded *

the lowliness of his handmaiden.

For behold from henceforth *

all generations shall call me blessed.

For he that is mighty hath magnified me, *

and holy is his Name.

And his mercy is on them that fear him *

throughout all generations.

He hath showed strength with his arm; *

he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat, *

and hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things, *

and the rich he hath sent empty away.

He remembering his mercy has holpen his servant Israel, *

as he promised to our forefathers,

Abraham and his seed 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.

Or Canticle 15

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: James 5:7-10

7 Brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord comes again. A farmer patiently waits for his valuable crop to grow from the earth and for it to receive the autumn and spring rains.

8 You, too, must be patient. Do not give up hope, because the Lord is coming soon.

9 Brothers and sisters, do not complain against each other or you will be judged guilty. And the Judge is ready to come! 10 Brothers and sisters, follow the example of the prophets

who spoke for the Lord. They suffered many hard things, but they were patient.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11

2 John the Baptist was in prison, but he heard about what the Christ was doing. So John sent some of his followers to Jesus. 3 They asked him, "Are you the One who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?"

4 Jesus answered them, "Go tell John what you hear and see: 5 The blind can see, the crippled can walk, and people with skin diseases are healed. The deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor. 6 Those who do not stumble in their faith because of me are blessed."

7 As John's followers were leaving, Jesus began talking to the people about John. Jesus said, "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed blown by the wind? 8 What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes live in kings' palaces. 9 So why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, and I tell you, John is more than a prophet. 10 This was written about him:

'I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare the way for you.'

11 I tell you the truth, John the Baptist is greater than any other person ever born, but even the least important person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.

The Gospel of the Lord

On December December 19 we celebrate the life of Lillian Trasher, Missionary in Egypt. Read from A Great Cloud of Witnesses.

Lillian Hunt Trasher was born in 1887 in Brunswick, Georgia. Raised by her mother

(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, 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 for which 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 during World War II, she kept her orphanage running. When she died in 1961, 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 17, 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.**