

Awake and hearken for He brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings!

Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin;
Make straight the way for God within,
And let us all our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.

We hail You as our Savior, Lord,
Our refuge and our great reward;
Without Your grace we waste away
Like flow'rs that wither and decay.

Stretch forth Your hand, our health restore,
And make us rise to fall no more;
Oh, let Your face upon us shine
And fill the world with love divine.

Leader: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be pleasing in Your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)
Participants: Amen.

Introduction

A man wandered into a park early one Saturday morning. He was attracted by the noise made by the participants and observers of a Little League baseball team. The man walked toward the game to get a better look at what was causing all the commotion. As he approached, he saw a very little guy sitting on the bench, cheering on his teammates. "Way to go Johnny. Let's get 'um David. Hang in there guys." The man determined that because of the boy's enthusiasm his team must be winning by a large margin. So he asked the boy what the score was. The boy looked a little defensive as he said, "Score's 14 to nothing, *them!*" His answer surprised the man. He looked at the little boy and said, "Then young man, how can you be so excited if you're getting beat so badly?" The boy looked at him in disbelief and said, "Mister, we haven't even been up to bat yet."

The young man lived with incredible hope. Such is the message of these three lessons. We live by incredible hope rooted and grounded in God's grace through faith in Jesus. War, famine, injustice, and pestilence seem to surround us. But our God reigns, and our God will save His people. "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; ... the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it." Jesus brings the power of love to make those changes happen. Since Jesus has been raised from the dead, there is no such thing as a lost cause for the people of God. There is always hope! "We haven't even been up to bat yet!"

1. Isaiah tells the people of Israel that their nation has been chopped down by sin. What do we as the people of God through faith in Jesus have in common with the little boy at the Little League game?

2. How can we demonstrate hope in a world devastated by sin with the confidence of the boy sitting on the bench, watching his team lose?

3. How might others respond to our confidence?

Inform

Consider the following summaries of the lessons assigned for the second Sunday in Advent.

Isaiah 40:1-11 — The prophet informs Israel that despite her apostasy she still enjoys the love and favor of God. That love and favor works itself out in a powerful way as God will raise up a Savior, even from the dead stump of sinful Israel. Jesus will come to those who

have turned from God, forgive them, and carry them close to His heart. God will reveal His glory to all people by the forgiveness He provides through His Son, our Savior Jesus.

2 Peter 3:8–14—Peter reminds his audience that God remains faithful to His promises. Jesus will return and with His return those who possess saving faith can look “forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of the righteousness.” Peter urges the people to remain steadfast in the faith until the day when Jesus returns.

Mark 1:1–8—John the Baptist comes to the people of Israel with Good News. Although he looks as though he stands in the tradition of those ancient prophets that proclaimed the imminent destruction of Israel because of its sin, John instead brings Good News. There is hope for Israel and the world. John preaches repentance for the forgiveness of sins as he prepares the way for Jesus, “One more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.”

1. How did Jesus demonstrate throughout His ministry “comfort” to God’s people?

2. How does Christ bring comfort to God’s people? How does God reveal His glory through the comfort Jesus provides?

3. How do Peter’s words provide comfort to God’s people?

4. How does Mark 1:1 summarize the comfort God provides to His people? How are these words a summary of all the words that Mark writes thereafter?

Connect

1. The comfort that Christ brings enables us to provide comfort to others. How might the God-given ability to comfort one another as Christ comforted us affect our congregations?

2. Jesus came to declare that God provides comfort to all, including the Gentiles. No one ever expected that comfort could be provided to the likes of them. Are there people today who might be considered modern-day “Gentiles,” to whom no one would expect God to provide comfort?

3. One characteristic that seems to identify American young people between 18 and 30 is that they have little hope for the future. How do the words of Isaiah speak to them? How might the forgiveness of sins and eternal life Jesus won for them on the cross enable them to live with the confidence of the young boy who proclaimed, “We haven’t even been up to bat yet”?

4. What attitudes and behaviors characterize the lives of those who are hopeless? What are the attitudes and behaviors that characterize the lives of those who live in confidence, the comfort about which each of the three lessons speak?

5. It must have been lonely for John the Baptist to be a voice of one calling in the desert. What principles and values do Christians proclaim today that might cause us also to feel like voices calling in the desert?

Vision

During this Week

1. Recall times in your life when the Lord has provided you comfort and confidence in the midst of what seemed like a wilderness. Praise Him for the confidence and comfort He provided.
2. The Pharisees and Sadducees believed that they were "better" than Gentiles and other people. John declared that this was not true, and he called on them to repent. Make a list of the pharisaical tendencies that exist in your life and ask God to forgive you and change you.
3. Recall a relationship in your life that has been harmed by selfishness. Ask God to help you reconcile with that person and take steps to make that reconciliation possible.

Closing Worship (Psalm 19:1-9)

Leader: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands."

Participants: "Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge."

Leader: "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard."

Participants: "Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

Leader: "In the heavens He has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course."

Participants: "It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat."

Leader: "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple."

Participants: "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart."

All: "The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever." Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Scripture Lessons for Next Sunday

Read in preparation for the Third Sunday in Advent Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28.