

Third Sunday in Advent; December 17, 2023
Isaiah 61:1-3, 10 and 11
The Lord Descends, Our Praise Ascends

**The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the afflicted.
He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom to the captives
and release for those who are bound,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance for our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
to provide for those who mourn in Zion,
to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
the oil of joy instead of mourning,
the cloak of praise instead of a faint spirit,
so that they will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD to display his beauty.**

**I will rejoice greatly in the LORD.
My soul will celebrate because of my God,
for he has clothed me in garments of salvation.
With a robe of righteousness he has covered me,
like a bridegroom who wears a beautiful headdress like a priest,
and like a bride who adorns herself with her jewelry.**

**For as the earth produces its growth,
and as a garden causes what been sown to sprout up,
so God the LORD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up
in the presence of all nations.**

Look how much the Triune God loves you! You can see him in the first verse of Isaiah 61: here is the Holy Spirit anointing the Lord's Servant – the Messiah, the Son of God – to carry out the work God the Father sent him to do. The Trinity loves you so much that from eternity the Father planned to send his Son to save you, and the Spirit anointed him – set him apart – to do it. That happened from eternity, and then for the whole world to see when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

So, your salvation is the work of your loving Triune God. But after the Father planned it and the Spirit anointed him, Jesus the Messiah took it from there. He came down **to preach good news to the poor**. Your Savior walked through the streets and into the synagogues and preached good news. He still preaches good news from the pages of the Bible, and through every believer to speaks his message truly. What is this good news he came down to preach? That he is here **to release those who are bound**. He came down to a world bound in sin, condemned to eternal bondage in hell, and set it free from sin and hell. He came down to **proclaim the year of the Lord's favor**. He proclaimed the Lord's favor so many times and in so many ways, and was very specific about where to find this divine favor: in himself, Jesus Christ.

The Father sent his Son down, and the Spirit anointed him to bring **the day of vengeance for our God**. Is this a brief pause in this love letter from God to you, this talk of vengeance? Not at all! Because his vengeance does not come for you who believe these words, but for your enemies: for Satan, for your sin, and for your grave. These are the enemies that nabbed when our father Adam fell into sin. These enemies torment us still because we sin still and still bring their curse on ourselves. But God promised revenge, final victory, over them all. And Jesus came down to bring it.

And what is the result of this freedom from sin and death, this vengeance against our enemies? It keeps getting better! Your Savior came **to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion, to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, a cloak of praise instead of a faint spirit**. What makes us mourn the most? What covers our thoughts in ashes and saps our spirit more quickly than anything else? There are many things that trouble us, but death does it most of all. But even in times and thoughts of death, Jesus comes down to comfort with solemn joy. Because after he set us free from sin with his perfect life and paid for our sins with his death on the cross, he came back to life. And so will all who die with faith in him. In the middle of death there is eternal life in him. He comes down with a resurrection, and gives us joy by turning death into the door of heaven.

This is what Jesus comes to do, sent by his Father to do it all, anointed by the Spirit to do it all, to do it all for you and me. What love our Triune God has for us, to send all this down to us in his Son.

And God's work for us does not stop there! The same Spirit who anointed the Son for this work plants us in this love: **they will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD**. The Spirit does not plant us flimsy brush or rolling tumbleweed. He plants us firmly in the Christian faith when we are baptized, and keeps working with Jesus' love to grow us big and strong in the faith. In addition to our Savior's work, the Spirit comes down in water and Word to plant us in faith.

And oak trees are beautiful, aren't they? We are made beautiful to God and to each other through faith in Jesus. Why does the Holy Spirit love so much to picture the Lord's people as plants? Look at this: he does it again, at the end of this chapter: **For as the earth produces its growth, and as a garden causes what has been sown to sprout up, so God the LORD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up in the presence of all people**. There it is again, and there is also the answer to why. Plants do not make themselves grow; they draw energy from the soil below and the water and sunshine from above. The Spirit plants us in God's salvation, and makes us grow to produce what God desires: righteousness and praise.

God has made you righteous in his Son, and created you to praise him. Be what God has made you. Live in the righteousness he has given you, and praise him especially by telling his love to your family and friends, whether they already believe it or do not yet. **I will rejoice greatly in the LORD. My soul will celebrate because of my God**. God's goodness to us grown us into joyful and celebratory people. We have the best thing of all to fill our hearts with joy and to make our souls celebrate: the saving love of the Triune God that has come down to us. Grow up in that love. And send up him a life of righteousness and praise.

Do it in joyful celebration, especially now as our Savior's birth draws near. His love descends to us; our praise goes up to him. **He has clothed me in garments of salvation. With a robe or righteousness he has covered me, like a bridegroom who wears a beautiful headdress like a priest, and like a bride who adorns herself with jewelry**. Jesus is coming down to cover you in righteousness, to make you beautiful to your loving God; send a life of joyful praise up to him. Amen.

