



Daily Prayer For Individuals and Families

Adopted from *The Lutheran Service Book* (p. 294)

December 11th, 2022

The Third Sunday of Advent

This brief service is intended as a simple form of daily prayer for individuals and families. When more than one person is present, the psalm and responses may be spoken responsively, with one person reading the words in regular type and the others responding with the words in bold type. The Creed and Prayers that are in bold type are to be said by all.

The sign of the cross ✝ may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

Invocation

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Introit

(From Philippians 4 & Psalm 71)

Rejoice in the Lord always;

again I will say, Rejoice.

I will hope continually

and will praise you yet more and more.

My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, of your deeds of salvation all the day,

for their number is past my knowledge.

With the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD I will come;

I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone.

O God, from my youth you have taught me,

and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.

So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,

until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.

For those with access to the internet, you may now play today's worship video, located on Bethany's website (www.bethanycr.org) under the Worship Resources tab and then continue with the Apostles' Creed. Everyone else may continue the service as printed....

Scripture Lesson

(Matthew 11:2-6)

²When John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ⁴And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Sermon – ✝ *John's Question* ✝ *(A copy is included at the end of this service.)*

Apostles' Creed

☩ I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And the life ✚ everlasting. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer



**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass
against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and
ever. Amen.**

Bethany's Prayer List

Thanksgiving

- Keziah Sage (daughter of Darin & Maren Elm) born 12/2
- Lorelei Hackbardt - recovering after surgery

Entrusting into God's Care

- Persecuted Christians and refugees
- Those suffering after the storm and during the pandemic
- Peace in Europe and throughout the world
- Project 24 students, Yvonne and Lorine

Healing

- Raymond (father of Lora Raymon) - hospitalization
- Joyce Fritz - hospice care
- Nora (great granddaughter of Pat Krekeler)- In NICU
- Courtney (Monday morning coffee friend) - cancer treatments
- Jean (mother of Kristi Montague)- hospitalization after stroke
- Carol (mother of Kris Larson) -hospice care

- Tom Larson - recovering after surgery
- Don Hein - recovering after surgery
- Lucas Heller - recovering after surgery
- Philip Hackbardt - recovering after tumor treatment
- Bonnie Bubke - recovering after hospitalization
- Doug Knutson - recovering at home after surgery
- Donna Birkicht - health issues
- Dave Dohrmann - recovering after surgery
- Stephen Stepanek - brain cancer treatment
- Abi Clark - health issues

Homebound

- Larry & Sharon Easler– Summit Point, Marion

Mourning, friends and family of

- Marian (friend of Don Hein)- died 12/2
- Karon (relative of Kroemer family)- died 12/2

Serving Our Country

- Mitchell & Benjamin (relatives of Schoens & Smiths) - US Navy
- Harrison (son of Siecks) - US Army, deployed to Poland
- Jordan (grandson of Kim Neuhaus) - National Guard, deployed

Collect of the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Concluding Prayers

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and take them to heart that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Together we pray... **I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that you would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.



✠ *John's Question* ✠

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Isaiah foretold that John the Baptist would be part of God's plan of salvation for all people hundreds of years before John was born. John leapt for joy in his mother's womb when he first encountered Jesus, who Himself was still being carried by His pregnant mother. And Jesus Himself said, "*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.*" John the Baptist is considered to be the greatest of all the prophets – which is why the question he asks in our Gospel reading is so strange.

John is in prison for speaking out against the king. So, he sends out some of his own followers to ask Jesus, "*Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?*" Now just stop and think about that for a minute, because it's a pretty important detail in the Gospel of Matthew. God had planned for John to prepare the way for Jesus to be the Savior of the world for hundreds, if not thousands of years – and maybe from the beginning of the world. And there is no one greater according to God. And yet, while in prison – John is wondering if Jesus is who he thought he was. Is Jesus the One? Is He the messiah, the Savior of the world?

This question, coming from John the Baptist, seems so unbelievable, that some Christians have said that John must have been asking a rhetorical question for the benefit of his followers. They've said that there is no way that someone as great as John could have possibly questioned Jesus' identity and therefore, he must of asked this question to teach his followers a lesson. Unfortunately, I think that people who say this about John, may be some of the same people who say that Christians today should never grieve or mourn over events in life. They might say that Christians should always be successful and never fail in anything if they really try. People who say that John could not have doubted, might be likely to say that true Christians today will never doubt what God is doing in the world He created.

Looking at the text however, there is no reason to doubt that when John asked Jesus if He was the One, that John was asking this question for himself. You see, as great as John was, he had some doubts before. When Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John, remember what happened? John **did not** jump right in and say, "OK, we have to do this to fulfill all righteousness!" No, he hesitated. He even questioned whether he was worthy enough to baptize Jesus (Matthew 3). Standing there in the Jordan, John had his doubts. He had his questions as to what God was up to.

And now, here in our text, John is not out in the wilderness, eating his locusts and wild honey. Rather, HE IS IN PRISON! John was the fiery prophet of the Lord, and he knew it. He was the one that called people to repentance. He was the one who called the hypocritical religious establishment a "*brood of vipers*"! He proclaimed the Day of the Lord is near. The threshing floor is about to be cleared. The furnace is ready to burn up the chaff. But now... now John is rotting away in an ancient prison cell. If Jesus is the One, where is the thunder of judgment? Where is

the rebuke of the wicked? Why this use of power over demons and not evil men like King Herod? Why did Jesus eat with sinners and yet allow God's prophet to rot in jail? John had heard of the works of Christ and His teaching with authority. What He has heard, however, does not seem to match with his "End Times" message nor with what he is experiencing. The question that John asks is his own and it is real.

Today, what we expect from Jesus may not always match with what we experience. To be sure there are those "mountain top" moments in our lives. Times when everything is going perfectly and we feel truly blessed. But there are also those moments in life where we feel like we're in the prison with John. We have the promises of God. We know He loves us and that all things work for our good. So why does Jesus tell the disciples to let the children come to Him, but our own children fall away from the church and lose their faith? Why does Jesus rule over heaven and earth for our benefit, yet our rulers seem so incapable or unwilling to do even a little good? Why did Jesus heal this person or raise that person from the dead, when cancer, or heart disease or diabetes or old age is ruining so many lives? When we have to mourn the death of friends and relatives? If God is ruling through Christ, why does His kingdom seem so hidden?

If you humbly ask these questions about God's reign in the world today, or others like them, then don't despair – for you're in good company. Not only did John question what God was or wasn't doing, but so did Moses at the burning bush and Elijah as he fled from Jezebel. After being beaten and put in prison himself Jeremiah said, "*Cursed be the day I was born*" [20:14] and "*why did I come out from the womb!*" [20:18]"

But if and when we question or doubt, then we need to hear what God has to say in response. Our text tells us Jesus said, "*Go tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them*" (Matthew 11:4-5). Jesus gives John the strongest possible "yes" to his question. The things that Jesus was doing were exactly the kinds of things that God said would happen when the new age of salvation would come. The OT promises are being fulfilled and the new era of salvation has arrived. Jesus is the One who was to come.

And yet, Jesus' answer invites John and all of us, to not only look at what God is doing, but also to accept with faith the paradox of His good and gracious actions. The reign of God has broken into the world through the person of Jesus and He is our Savior. But the power of evil still remains strong, and Christ will not overthrow that evil – yet. Jesus has also come to save people from their sin, yet He also clearly teaches His followers to expect opposition and even hatred. Despite God coming to rule and restore through Jesus, only God can reveal Jesus' true identity and many will fall into unbelief because of Jesus and His hidden ways of revealing God's reign. He is the King of all Creation who will give eternal life to all who believe in Him, and yet He must do this by suffering and dying Himself as a despised criminal on the cross.

John was the first person who had to learn this paradox and live by faith in this way. And since John, this paradox of God working through Christ, but not yet completely fulfilling His reign, has had to be learned by the apostles and Christians of every generation since. It doesn't mean that John, or Moses, or Jeremiah or any of us have lost our faith. This does not mean that God is not real or that Jesus is not our Savior. It simply means that His ways are not ours and our time schedule is not His.

Jesus finishes His answer to John by saying, "*Blessed is the one who is not offended by me*" (Matthew 11:6). One can easily imagine that John, tired and cold and hungry and frustrated in prison, heard the Lord's message as truly Good News filled with joy and hope. Believer's today, who struggle with the hiddenness of Christ's reign and rule can hear Jesus's answer to John as an

invitation to live by faith themselves. And not stumble over Him, but to rejoice in God's gracious and hidden reign. For there is no question, Jesus is the One who is our God and Savior who loves us and will make sure that everything happens for our benefit. Amen.

