

Announcements:

- All reports for the annual report need to be in by January 19th.
- 2021 offering envelopes are available for pickup on Tuesdays from 8am to noon

Readings:

Psalm 147:12-20

¹²Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem;
praise your God, O Zion,

¹³who has strengthened the bars of your gates
and has blessed your children within you.

¹⁴God has established peace on your borders
and satisfies you with the finest wheat.

¹⁵God sends out a command to the earth,
a word that runs very swiftly.

¹⁶God gives snow like wool,
scattering frost like ashes.

¹⁷God scatters hail like bread crumbs.
Who can stand against God's cold?

¹⁸The Lord sends forth the word and melts them;
the wind blows, and the waters flow.

¹⁹God declares the word to Jacob,
statutes and judgments to Israel.

²⁰The Lord has not done so to any other nation;
they do not know God's judgments. Hallelujah!

Ephesians 1:3-14

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us
in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he
chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and

blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

John 1: 1-18

[¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.]

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not

of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Let us pray,

God of goodness, you give us grace upon grace each and every day. Open our hearts and our minds to your word of truth and grace. Amen

This is the beginning of the Gospel of John. It rushes in starting at the tipping point of creation where God is speaking God's word into being. In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke there is a manger and a silent night. In Matthew you have the visiting three wise men from the east. In Luke you find the shepherds who were watching their flocks at night. Those other gospels being messages full of angels and miracles. While, here today, we have the beginning of the gospel of John, a message of light and grace and truth thundering into the existence of creation.

This text is a challenging text to read and to hear. It is a very poetic text and that makes it more difficult to interpret. The words and concepts become a bit blurred after a few verses in. Yet, we do get some themes that are present in this text and will be present throughout the entirety of John. We learn that God and light have a relationship to one another. You will hear time and time again comparison and stories set in particular times of day or that Jesus has come to the earth to be a light-bringer. There is the theme of the rejection of Jesus already in chapter 1 of John. We hear that people will not accept Jesus, but those who do will be rewarded greatly. Lastly, in our

text this morning we hear the theme of incarnation. We hear that Jesus is closely related to God as God's son and there is no hiding that he is partly divine, while being human for John.

It is not John who brings this message of God being incarnate walking on this earth, bringing light, and being rejected except by the righteous. It is very clearly Jesus who is the one who carries the Word, or God's word into this world. There are a few things that our text this morning declares that Jesus, the Son of God, is filled with. John declares in his poetic ramble that Jesus is filled with grace and truth. Because of this reason we have received grace upon grace.

To deter my sermon from beginning to sound like the Gospel of John, I want us to hear today the message of who Jesus is and what Jesus brings. Jesus is the Word of God incarnate walking on this earth. He is the embodied Son of God both human and divine. He is the one who comes carrying the light of God to bring a message of redemption and salvation into this world. Most importantly, he brings this message filled with truth and filled with grace for all of us. How amazing is it that Jesus is all of these things? We know that John's prediction is true, too. That though Jesus bring this message of truth and grace, he will be rejected even to the point of being crucified.

For today, we have been given a good reminder. We have been reminded that our salvation was an extraordinary person, filled with God. He was filled with God's grace and truth. This text is a reminder for us today that this is the message that Jesus gives us. It is our job this and every day to receive and hear the truth and to remember that we have been given God's grace through Jesus. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession:

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Redeeming God, you gather together your people from the farthest parts of the earth. Protect your church from stumbling. Let it not be overcome by sorrow, division, or despair. Make us radiant with goodness, that we might live always to the praise of your glory. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You bring together heaven and earth. All creation testifies to your splendor. Hold the ecosystems of this earth in delicate balance, from coastlands to farmlands, forests to wetlands, deserts to rainforests. Show us new ways to live in harmony with the world around us. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You overflow with grace upon grace. Expand the imaginations of those who serve in positions of authority. Open their hearts to the needs of their nations and communities. Protect all those in harm's way and those risking danger for the sake of others. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You bring consolation to those who weep. Embrace those who feel far-off, excluded, or defeated. Accompany those living with chronic and invisible illness. Sustain the weak and weary. Refresh those who labor under the weight of pain or sickness (especially Audrey, Selma, the family and friends of Audrey, and those we name in our hearts from where we are). Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You come to us in the beauty of darkness and of light. Bring justice and reconciliation to communities divided by oppressions and misuse of power. Guide us to speak holy words of advocacy and truth. Help us to honor your image in one another. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You turn our mourning into joy. We give thanks for those who have died in faith. With all the saints, give us our inheritance in Christ. In the fullness of time, gather us all together in your mercy. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and

all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus.

Amen.