

WELCOMING IN CHRIST
Monthly Devotional
for the St. Paul's Anniversary Campaign

DECEMBER 2018

The Season of Advent anticipating and reflecting the Light of Christ
Welcoming St. Paul's future

TEXTS:

Luke 1:68-79

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

REFLECTIONS: Zechariah, the elderly, pious priest in Judea during the reign of Herod, named for an Old Testament prophet, husband of Elizabeth (an older cousin of Mary) was incredulous when the angel Gabriel appeared to let him know that in their dotage they would finally become parents. With God, of course, one's age or situations are not a problem. Their son would be named John, he would become a great prophet "...to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Each December we tend to dwell upon the second chapter of Luke's gospel, but the first chapter tells about ordinary people, too, who are given extraordinary news and responsibilities, whose faithful service is essential and who, in the power of the Holy Spirit, become eloquent bearers of Good News. Advent anticipates a good future, gathering family, celebrating with friends, giving thanks together. The brief note from St. Paul the apostle to friends at Thessalonica is like a Christmas card: "...may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all." This is *Welcoming in Christ*. Even at the darkest time of the year, scripture reminds us: "Arise, shine, for your Light has come!" God is in Christ, reconciling the world. Heaven and nature sing!

PRAYERS: Advent encourages joyful anticipation. As we prepare again for Christmas and beyond, let us pray and live with renewed confidence and grace. ***O God of Elizabeth and Mary, you visited your servants with news of the world's redemption in the coming of the Savior. Make our hearts leap with joy, and fill our mouths with songs of praise, that we may announce glad tidings of peace, and welcome the Christ in our midst. Amen.***



ART: Our expressions and gestures can say as much as our words and actions. Here Elizabeth and Zechariah begin to realize and anticipate their essential roles in God's work of salvation. Look at their faces. What are they thinking? They will be the parents of John—the wilderness prophet who prepares the way for God's Messiah, who even baptizes Jesus, and who later asks, "Are you the one?" just before he is martyred. Parents as well as parishes see new hope and promise for God's larger world through their children and grand-children.

Elizabeth and Zechariah, stained glass, c. 1214; Cathédrale Saint-Etienne de Bourges; Bourges, France

ACTION: During the holy season of Advent we wait, thankful for sixty years past and eager to share God's future for the St. Paul's parish. We are surely gifted with essential missions: to welcome, witness, worship, educate, and serve. How shall we be a faithful church family together—younger and older, longtime and recent, financially blessed and economically challenged, deeply spiritual and newly inspired? As we consider what is ahead, let us be glad participants making generous commitments to the annual budget for 2019 as well as to the *Welcoming in Christ!* campaign. We affirm in wonder and awe with Zechariah, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them."