



Mission Interpretation

Telling stories of our hands doing God's work

Mission Memo #445

December 11, 2018

Third Sunday of Advent (December 16, 2018)



The presence of the Lord "in your midst" in the wonder of the holy supper is cause for singing. The nearness of the Lord in prayer, in every circumstance, is cause for rejoicing. The coming of one "more powerful" than John, even with his winnowing fork in his hand, is good news—and cause for exultation—for us who are being saved. Great joy is the tone for the third Sunday of Advent.

Readings

- [Zephaniah 3:14-20](#) - *Rejoice, the Lord is in your midst*
- [Isaiah 12:2-6](#) - *In your midst is the Holy One of Israel. (Is. 12:6)*
- [Philippians 4:4-7](#) - *Rejoice, the Lord is near*
- [Luke 3:7-18](#) - *One more powerful is coming, baptizing with fire*

No More Business as Usual

Lutherans looking for gospel may hear John the Baptizer's preaching as primarily law. It can be difficult to reconcile his fire-and-brimstone style with the joy that traditionally belongs to the third Sunday of Advent. Yet despite John's harsh words for the crowds, the people seem eager for his teaching—"What then should we do?" They keep asking questions fervently, even when the answers call them to higher expectations of moral and selfless living.

It's the kind of teaching that people associate with the Messiah: good news that business as usual is on the way out and something new is on its way in. The status quo of greed, selfishness, scarcity, and complacency no longer has power. A new day of mutual sharing and justice is almost here. Images of the winnowing fork and the ax at the root of the tree suggest clearing out old habits and fears to make room for something new. In calling people to repentance, John invites them to turn away from the old life and turning toward God's new life.

John has even better news: The Messiah is indeed coming, one who will not only call people to high expectations, but also enable that faithful living. Because the Messiah is coming to baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire," life will never be the same. Through baptism business as usual will be replaced by a fruit-bearing, joy-

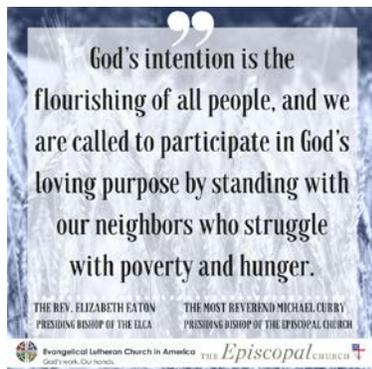
yielding, grace-filled relationship with God. It's an excellent reason to "rejoice always" (1 Thess. 5:16): The Lord is near!

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, Christmas Message 2018

ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton shares her 2018 Christmas message. We are free to greet this holy season knowing that Christ's cradle defeats the grave. Life and healing and hope come to us in the child in the manger. ([Click here or on picture](#))



DECEMBER 21, PRAY. FAST. ACT:



As we near the end of the year, we recognize the final month of our shared #PrayFastAct campaign with The Episcopal Church. Over the course of the last two years, we have been grateful for our shared ecumenical partnership, focusing on the ways systemic change can make a meaningful difference for those of us struggling with poverty.

Focusing on a different theme each month (from hunger, health, community, shelter, and much more), the #PrayFastAct campaign stemmed from the recognition that effective approaches to poverty address the needs of the whole human person. Taking a small amount of time out of our busy schedules each month to pray, fast and act may seem like a small step; but in routine action it can serve as a transformative tool to ensure our neighbors do not fall through the cracks when times are hard. Through the end of this month, we hope you have a chance to review the current alerts found at [ELCA Action Center](#) and [ELCA.org/prayfastact](#) that address many of those needs today. We act out of the conviction that the status quo has not been effective enough for many of us in need, and that conviction continues. Look forward to an upcoming video later this month to see a full review of our campaign, and what steps are ahead for 2019.

From LSSI, The Gift of Literacy



When I asked Larry whether he had always loved to read, he scoffed and said emphatically, "No! I hated reading when I was a kid." Yet today he's trained as a literacy tutor for LSSI.

Larry is 43, a father, and a grandfather. He is also an inmate at Illinois' Pinckneyville Correctional Center and a former gang member. He couldn't read when he was first incarcerated, but he learned through the prison's education classes.

"The first time I was able to read a whole book it was like a light bulb went off. I can just disappear out of this place when I'm reading!"

Larry now reads at a college level, has completed his Associate's Degree, and is one of four Pinckneyville inmates who are tutoring their peers in reading.

They are part of Inmates Helping Inmates, a new cooperative program between LSSI's [Prisoner and Family Ministry \(PFM\)](#) program and Catholic Charities of Southern Illinois.

Today I'm asking you to give as generously as possible so that more people like Larry can discover the joys of reading. All donations up to \$10,000 will be matched dollar-for-dollar when given before the end of the year. That means [your gift today](#) will be doubled!

97% of illiterate inmates will learn to read when they are tutored by other inmates.

Just think! You can help incarcerated people learn to read...greatly improving their chance of success once they return to society.

All gifts received by the end of December, up to a total of \$10,000, will be matched. That means [our donations now](#) is worth twice as much.

We wait in joyful hope

There's an ancient little prayer - maybe as old as the fourth or fifth century — that some Christians insert into the Lord's Prayer right before the doxology (which explains that funny little stumble whenever an ecumenical group recites the Lord's Prayer together). There are a lot of variations, as you'd expect for such an ancient text, but one version in particular makes it the perfect Advent prayer.

[Download the Monthly Devotion](#) from WELCA



A Singing Communion of Churches

During this Advent season, LWF member churches are sharing hymns from their congregations to show how the Lutheran communion regions prepare for Christ's coming into this world. We want to use this period to reflect on and celebrate the diversity, uniqueness and oneness of God's gifts to us.



Martin Luther wrote:

I would certainly like to praise music with all my heart as the excellent gift of God which it is and to commend it to everyone. . . it has been instilled and implanted in all creatures, individually and collectively. For nothing is without sound or harmony. Even the air. . .

[Click here](#) to check out the LWF site for a daily hymn during Advent.

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unexpected
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Still looking for that perfect gift for someone? Check out the [ELCA Good Gift site](#) for something that will bring a smile and make life better for others.

Coming Events:

Date	Event/Activity	Resources
June 7 and 8, 2019	2019 MC Synod Assembly, Tinley Park Convention Center, 18451 Convention Center Dr., Tinley Park, IL	For more information visit http://www.mtselca.org/assembly/
Aug 5-10, 2019	ELCA Churchwide Assembly, at the Wisconsin Center, Milwaukee, Wisc.	For more information visit https://www.elca.org/churchwideassembly