

## WORSHIP NOTES

*Second Sunday of Advent • December 4, 2011*

### **The Season**

Today is the commemoration of John of Damascus, theologian and hymnwriter, who died around 749. John is known as one of the Fathers of the Greek Church. He left a career in finance and government to become a monk in an abbey near Jerusalem. His best known theological work is *The Fount of Wisdom*, and the third part of this work is a summary of the orthodox faith. John of Damascus wrote many hymns as well as theological works, and the doctrinal character of later Greek hymnody is often attributed to him. Among his best known hymns in the western church are “Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain” and “The Day of Resurrection.”

Advent not only prepares us for the birth of Jesus, it prepares us to live our lives to receive him. Our scripture readings are characterized by anticipation and the promise of righteousness, justice, and peace for all of God’s people. We are called to look deeply into our hearts and clear the way for the rule and reign of the Lord. In great contrast to the consumer bonanza around us, in the midst of the sights and sounds of Christmas, we are invited to a different place to hear God’s word. It was in the wilderness of Judea . . . and John the Baptizer appeared, the voice of one crying out . . .

### **In Word . . .**

Our Old Testament reading is a beautiful poem from the prophet known as Second Isaiah, announcing that the exile of God’s people in Babylon is over. In this reading we catch a glimpse of God’s compassion, power, glory, majesty, love, and above all, comfort. “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.” On the Second and Third Sundays of Advent, our gospel focuses on John the Baptizer. John is one of God’s messengers, and he enters the scene proclaiming repentance, baptism, and forgiveness of sin, challenging us to turn from everything that clutters our lives, and to be the people God calls us to be. It is a call to renewal, and a call to remember the place of God in our lives. John’s message begins the Gospel of Mark and points to the “one that is to come.” As our Advent journey continues, we remember God’s saving hand in the past and trust in the future, where “kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss” (Psalm 85:10). We pray in these days that our lives will make ready the way, and point to our Lord whose birth we await and whose reign in eternity will never end. This is, “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ . . .”

### **And Song . . .**

#### **Traditional (9:00)**

“Hark the Glad Sound” was written by Philip Doddridge in 1735 with the heading “Christ’s message from Luke 4:18-19.” Doddridge wrote some 400 hymn texts, usually to accompany his sermons. Our hymnal has included four of the original seven stanzas of this hymn. Verse 1 speaks about the Savior’s coming, verses 2 and 3 quote passages from Isaiah and Luke, and verse 4 is our response of welcome and praise. The tune RICHMOND, also known as CHESTERFIELD, was composed by Thomas Haweis and published in his collection *Carmina Christo* (1792). It was later adapted and shortened by Samuel Webbe, Jr.

#### **Contemporary (10:30)**

“Comfort, My People” is from Ian Callanan’s collection, *The Source of Life*. Callanan is one of Ireland’s leading composers of liturgical music, and his works are inspired by Ireland’s musical tradition. Callanan bases his texts on Scripture as well as the writings of the early followers of Christ, and his music for Advent reflects on the different character of each Sunday of this season.