



Beyond Human Time

Sunday, December 17, 2023
Extended Advent 6



48 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY ~ (585) 223-0634 ~ www.blcfairport.org
The Rev. Abigail Zang Hoffman and The Rev. Amy Walter-Peterson, co-Pastors

Sunday, December 17, 2023

PRELUDE

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BWV 659
(Savior of the Nations, Come)

Johann Sebastian Bach

ANNOUNCEMENTS

“Rejoice always,” declares 1 Thessalonians 5:16. Isaiah makes clear that God is turning our mourning into laughter and shouts of joy. “All God’s children got a robe,” go the words of a spiritual. It is not so much a stately, formal, pressed outfit as it is a set of party clothes, clothes we are happy to wear. We receive that robe in baptism, and in worship we gather for a foretaste of God’s party.

SPECIAL MUSIC

A Star, A Song

Hal H. Hopson

BLC Children’s Choir
assisted by Phyllis Stock, piano

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather today.

It is time to worship!

We listen for God

It is time to hear!

We receive God’s grace.

It is time to be loved!

We leave in peace.

It is time to serve others!

As we wait for Jesus’ arrival, Emmanuel, God-with-us, is already here in this time and place.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

With God, there is always time for forgiveness. We trust God, and we confess our sins together.

Brief pause

Holy One,

We have not stayed awake. We have missed you when you appeared in our neighbors, in strangers half a world away, in the suffering planet. We have wasted the time and the skills that you gave us and assumed we were powerless to mend the breaches in our world. Sometimes, we have given up on your mercy, justice, and love. Speak tenderly to our anxious hearts. Tear open the heavens and heal what we have done. Amen.

People of God, hear this good news: In the name of † Jesus Christ, all your sins are forgiven. Forgiveness gives us the courage we need. Wherever we wait for God's time to come, we will witness wonders.

Amen.

GATHERING HYMN	Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn	ELW 242
----------------	--------------------------------------	---------

GREETING

The grace of God, who was, who is, and who is to come, be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE



Lord, have mer - cy__ on your peo - ple. Christ have mer - cy__ on__ us.
Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son.__ Chri - ste e - le - i - son.



Shine your light in__ to our__ dark-ness. Fill__ us__ with your ho - ly love.
Heal all__ con - flicts be - tween na - tions. Teach us__ how to__ live as one.



Be our strength in times of__ trou - ble. Set us free from_ chains that_ bind.
Show us how to love our__ neigh - bor. Run to those who_ cry for__ help.



Breathe new_ life in - to our__ spir - its. Pu - ri - fy our__ hearts and minds.
Word made flesh who lives a - mong us; Christ our__ Lord, Em - man - u - el.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE

“When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.”
(Psalm 126:1)

Let us pray.

Almighty God, you are outside our days, weeks, and months; you are beyond time.
When you draw near, you disturb our schedules and our certainty.
As we light another Advent candle, disrupt our time as only you can—to teach us,
to free us, to be near us.

Amen.

The Advent candle will be lit as we sing:

(Sung 3 times: st. 1/ All st. 2/ Cantors st. 1/ All)



1. We light the Ad - vent can - dles a - gainst the win - ter night,
2. Three can - dles now are gleam - ing and show us the true way,



to wel - come our Lord Je - sus who is the world's True Light,
re - joice, the Bap - tist cries out, your Lord has come to - day,



to wel - come our Lord Je - sus who is the world's True Light.
re - joice, the Bap - tist cries out, your Lord has come to - day!

assisted by cantors: Paige O'Malley, Paul O'Malley

HEARING GOD'S WORD

DISMISSAL TO WORSHIP FOR KIDS

All kids ages 3 through elementary are welcome to a special time of hearing the Word, conversation and activity! Parents can remain in the sanctuary while the kids gather in the room across the hall from the side entrance to the sanctuary. Kids will return during the offering so they can participate in Communion.

READING: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Though the people had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, they continued to face hardship and oppression. In the language of the jubilee year described in Leviticus 25, the prophet, moved by the spirit of God, announces deliverance for those who are oppressed and comfort for those who mourn.

¹The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;

²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

³to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

⁸For I the Lord love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge

that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.

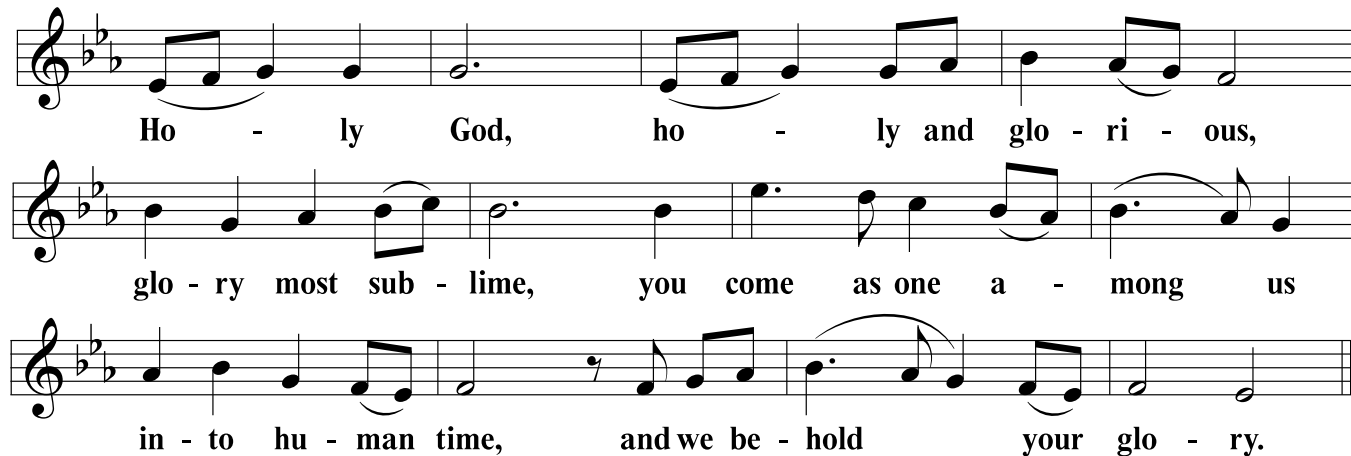
¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



Ho - ly God, ho - ly and glo - ri - ous,
glo - ry most sub - lime, you come as one a - mong us
in - to hu - man time, and we be - hold your glo - ry.

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

GOSPEL: John 1:6-8, 19-28

John's gospel describes Jesus as the "light of the world." John the Baptist is presented as a witness to Jesus, one who directs attention away from himself to Christ, the true light.

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.

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those

who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said,

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,

‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ”

as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY	Now the Heavens Start to Whisper	ACS 901
-----------------	----------------------------------	---------

assisted by Sue Cardinal, flute

Now the Heavens Start to Whisper



1 Now the heav - ens start to whis - per, as the veil is grow - ing thin.
2 Heav - y clouds that block the moon - light now be - gin to drift a - way.
3 Christ, e - ter - nal Sun of jus - tice, Christ, the rose of wis - dom's seed,



Earth from slum - ber wakes to lis - ten to the stir - ring, faint with - in:
Dia - mond bril - liance through the dark - ness shines the hope of com - ing day.
come to bless with fire and fra - grance hours of yearn - ing, hurt, and need.



seed of prom - ise, deep - ly plant - ed, child to spring from Jes - se's stem!
Christ, the morn - ing star of splen - dor, gleams with - in a world grown dim.
In the lone - ly, in the strang - er, in the out - cast, hid from view;



Like the soil be - neath the frost - line, hearts grow soft to wel - come him.
Heav - en's em - ber fans to full - ness; hearts grow warm to wel - come him.
Child who comes to grace the man - ger, teach our hearts to wel - come you.



THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Our prayers are always offered on behalf of the whole community.

People of God, we are each other's kin, and we are family with all creation. As we wait and yearn for God, we pray together for our community, for the church around the world, and for every need.

A brief silence.

#1 Fill our mouths with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy as we bear witness to the great things you have done. Give us a spirit of gladness as we gather and as we are sent. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

#2 Let the trees of the field sing your praise. Protect forests, orchards, rainforests, and all wooded areas from disease and deforestation. Keep us grateful for their gifts of oxygen, food, shade, and shelter. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

#3 You love justice and promise your favor to those who are oppressed, brokenhearted, and incarcerated. Grant wisdom and compassion to those who work for public safety and all who work within prisons, jails, and courts, that mercy may increase and violence wither away. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Come, Lord Jesus to neighbors far and near. Deepen our kinship with these members and friends of Bethlehem and their families: Dale & Ginny, Lori, Howard & Janet, Jim & Marcia, and Larry & Ros. Strengthen the ministries we share with others, especially our twinned parish in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Come, Lord Jesus to all who are hungry, thirsty, ill, or experiencing any struggles.

We pray for those in need of healing, especially:

- Emily R, friend of Pastor Amy, as she continues treatment for cancer
- Roberta B, sister of Carolyn Ann S, as she moves into a new home and recovers from eye surgery

Hear also these concerns we raise to you in our hearts or on our voice.

Silence for individual prayer.

Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

God, you are always with us. We gather these prayers together, and we entrust them to your endless love in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

SHARING GOD'S MEAL

THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

Share the peace in a way that cares for friend and neighbor.

If you worship virtually, share the peace through the comments section or text.

OFFERING

Information about supporting Bethlehem's ministry with your offerings is available in the Welcome insert in your pew rack or by visiting

blcfairport.org/support-our-ministry.

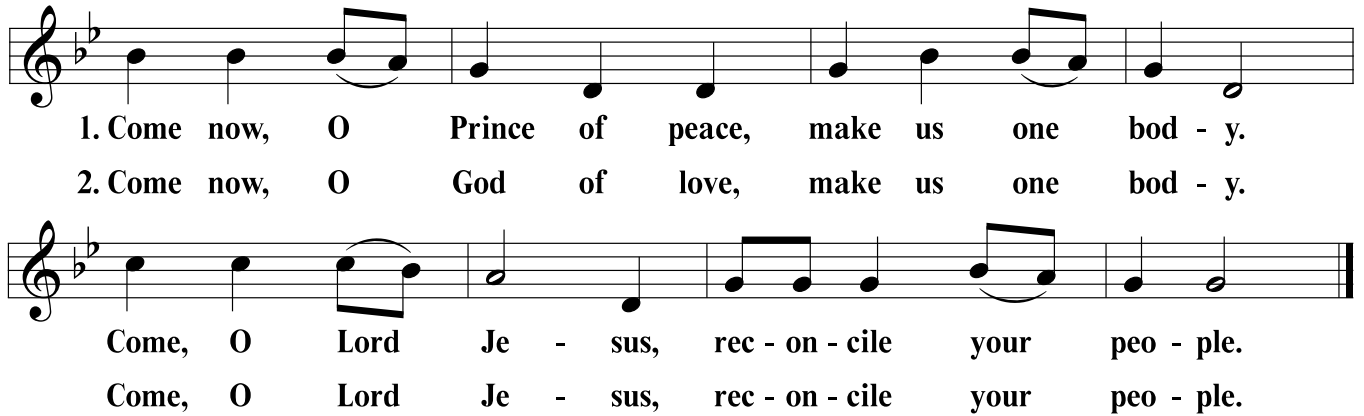
OFFERING OF MUSIC

O Love So Small

text, Mary Kay Beall
music, John Carter

The Chancel Choir

OFFERTORY



1. Come now, O Prince of peace, make us one bod - y.
2. Come now, O God of love, make us one bod - y.

Come, O Lord Je - sus, rec - on - cile your peo - ple.
Come, O Lord Je - sus, rec - on - cile your peo - ple.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray. Loving God, for the time we have, and for the gifts we offer, we say:

Thank you.

For the chance to help others, and for the people whose lives will be better because of these gifts, we say:

Thank you.

For the ways you are changing the world, we say:

Thank you.

We pray in the name of Jesus, who appears wherever people need our help.

Amen.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

God, our Creator

the abundance of your goodness overflows into creation.

Through the generations

your goodness continues to flow in friendship with humanity.

From beyond time into this moment

your goodness comes in this meal.

When the time was right, you entered our human existence in Jesus, who was born humbly, who spent his life with the unlikely and unloved, who healed and taught and preached the good news of your way.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Whenever we share this bread and cup,

Jesus is here with us, in this moment, in this time and place.

Whenever we share this bread and cup,

God takes us out of time and joins us with God's people in every time and place.

Whenever we share this bread and cup, we proclaim the mystery of faith.
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Send the Spirit of your presence on us now, O God, so that we too will overflow with goodness.

Strengthen us by this meal, so that through us, your presence will flow out in mercy, justice, and love. Amen

THE LORD'S PRAYER

We prepare for you, praying as you taught us,

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who

sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours,

now and forever. Amen

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

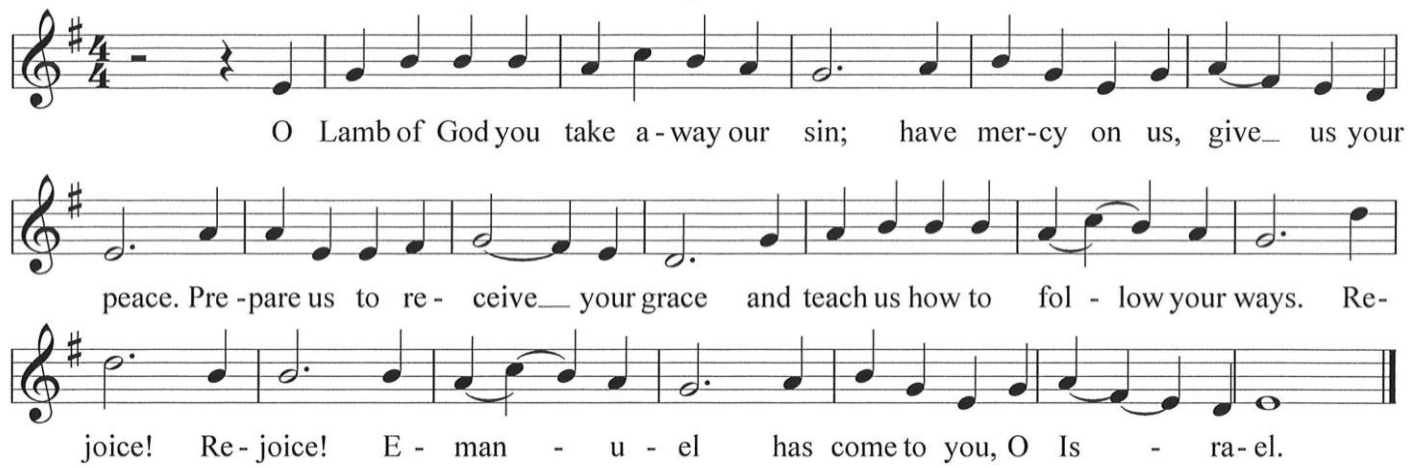
The time is now! Taste and see God's goodness!

Thanks be to God!

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

Our communion bread is gluten-free, unless noted by the pastor. Grape juice is available; indicate your need to the communion assistant. If you worship through the Livestream and wish to receive communion, please reach out to one of the pastors.

THE COMMUNION



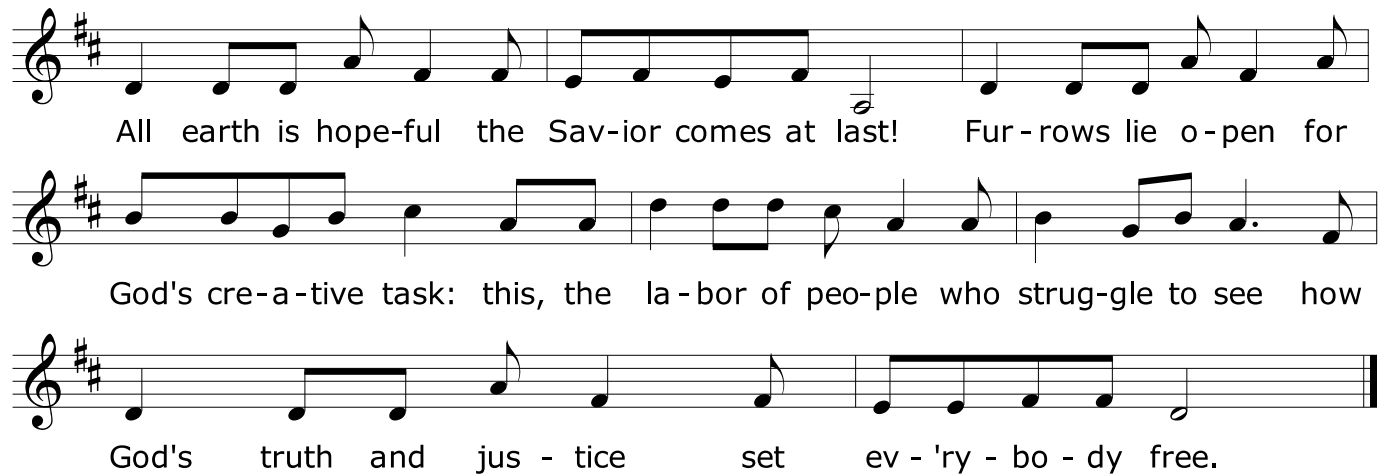
O Lamb of God you take a-way our sin; have mer-cy on us, give_ us your
 peace. Pre -pare us to re - ceive__ your grace and teach us how to fol - low your ways. Re-
 joice! Re - rejoice! E - man - u - el has come to you, O Is - ra - el.

COMMUNION HYMNS
 Unexpected and Mysterious
 Savior of the Nations, Come

ELW 258
 ELW 263

TABLE BLESSING

POST-COMMUNION CANTICLE



All earth is hope-ful the Sav-ior comes at last! Fur-rows lie o-pen for
 God's cre-a-tive task: this, the la-bor of peo-ple who strug-ple to see how
 God's truth and jus - tice set ev - 'ry - bo - dy free.

LEAVING TO SERVE

BENEDICTION

God our Creator, present before time; † Jesus our Redeemer, arriving at the right time; The Holy Spirit our Enlivener, acting in our time; Bless you now and always. **Amen.**

SENDING HYMN

People, Look East

ELW 248

DISMISSAL

Keep alert: trust God; go in peace.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Jakaż to gwiazda błyszczy na wschodzie
(Oh, What Kind of Star Shines in the East)

Stefan Surzyński

BLC Musicians

Raelynn Clare, Music Director and Organist

Dr. Jim Jefferis, Director of The Chancel Choir

Rich Towsley, Director of The Folk Group and BLC Dulcimers

Thank you to all those who participated in worship this Sunday! Want to learn more about what roles are needed in worship or sign-up for a pre-scheduled role? Talk with Mark Finke or one of the pastors following worship or contact Mark directly at volunteersupport@blcfairport.org.

The altar flowers are given by Donna Knights in honor of all the church members who supported the Angel Tree program.

Communicate with us: Share more about who you are, request further information, or leave a prayer request or comment through our website - <https://blcfairport.org/share-in-worship/> - scroll down the page to request or share information.

What's happening at BLC this week? Visit the Calendar of Events at www.blcfairport.org. Zoom links for virtual meetings are also found there. If you would like to schedule a meeting or event, please email the church office at office@blcfairport.org or visit <https://blcfairport.org/blc-facility-request/>

Church office hours: Our co-Pastors are available Sunday-Thursday and on-call for emergencies. Contact them directly to schedule an appointment either by calling (585) 223-0634 or emailing pastor.hoffman@blcfairport.org or pastor.amy@blcfairport.org.

Augsburg Fortress resources are being livestreamed by permission. All rights reserved.

From *Sundays and Seasons.com*. Copyright 2023 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.

Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #43732.

Permission to stream and print the music in this service obtained from One License under Annual License #A-724002

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education

Of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Out of Time Liturgy © 2021 by Barn Geese Worship. Used by permission of Barn Geese Worship. [Adapted by Pastor Amy Walter-Peterson.]

Everlasting Light Musical Liturgy © 2011 by Pastor David Eck.

We Light the Advent Candles: WORDS: Gracia Grindal (1943 -); WORDS: German folk tune; Words © 1999 Hope Publishing Company

Now the Heavens Start to Whisper: Text: Mary Louise Bringle, b. 1953

Music: SUO GÂN, Welsh melody; arr. hymnal version Text © 2006 GIA Publications, Inc., giamusic.com. All rights reserved.

Arr. © 2020 Augsburg

Give Witness and Rejoice

This Sunday of Advent—often known as *Gaudete (rejoice)*—is one in which the church has rejoiced as the advent of the Messiah draws nearer. Whether or not you mark this Sunday with a pink candle on the wreath, the texts for the day echo this rejoicing, this “we’re almost there” excitement, in a multitude of ways. Isaiah couples images of a people restored with images of weddings and springtime and oak trees. Psalm 126 offers up images of a harvest festival, and Paul urges us to rejoice “always.”

John the Baptist, in his own way, calls for rejoicing by his acknowledgment that he is *not* what we are waiting for. John, like us, has a mission to bear witness, but when he says “I am not,” we hear a clear contrast to all the ways Jesus will identify himself with the Father: “I am the bread of life.” “I am the resurrection.” “I am the good shepherd.” All these things Jesus will be for God’s people, but John’s job is simply to bear witness to the light.

How do we bear witness, while still waiting? Or can joy in the midst of waiting be that very witness? In Advent we are not called to act as though we do not know how this story ends, as though Jesus’ birth and life, death and resurrection, are still before us. But we *do* know that sense of longing for God’s salvation to be fulfilled, and the temptation to imagine that we have to save ourselves, instead of waiting for God’s purposes to be worked out in God’s time. John reminds us that there can be joy in taking our proper place, pointing to Jesus without needing to *be* Jesus.