

**Addresses
for
Morning and Evening Prayer**

**according to the
1943 Lectionary
of the
USA 1928 Book of Common Prayer**

**Intended for use
by Layreaders
in the absence of a priest**

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Rochester NH**

Advent 4

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Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Isa 40:1-11

Here beginneth

the fortieth chapter of the Prophet Isaiah.

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

6 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:

7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.

8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

9 O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

... make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.

These things will I do unto them, says the Lord and not forsake them."

Let us pray.

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

Do we know Him as He walks among us?
 Do we live our lives as though He is present?
 We are called to be His people,
 but are we His?

Isaiah gave voice to the Lord's cry:
"Behold my servant ... He shall not fail ..."
 He says that He shall come,
*"To open the blind eyes,
 to bring out the prisoners from the prison,
 and them that sit in darkness
 out of the prison house, "*
 but he also says,
*The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man,
 he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war:
 he shall cry, yea, roar;
 he shall prevail against his enemies."*

The Incarnation is far more
 than the sweet story of a pure child,
 the bleating of sheep, the mooing of cows,
 and the singing of angels.
 It's not a victory -- not yet --
 It's a battle in a war fought on Calvary,
 won in the Resurrection,
 but not yet ended until He comes again in glory,
 but in the end,
 when the age is over,
 we will find that, in all our struggle,
 in all our failure,
 He has been with us. As Isaiah said, He
*"... will bring the blind by a way that they knew not;
 ... lead them in paths that they have not known:*

10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong
 hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his
 reward is with him, and his work before him.

11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall
 gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in
 his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with
 young.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: Luke 3:1-17

*Here beginneth the third chapter of
 the Gospel according to St. Like.*

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius
 Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea,
 and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his
 brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of
 Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,
 2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the
 word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias
 in the wilderness.

3 And he came into all the country about Jordan,
 preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission
 of sins;

4 As it is written in the book of the words of
 Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying
 in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
 make his paths straight.

5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain
 and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked
 shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be
 made smooth;

6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.
 7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
 8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.
 9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
 10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?
 11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.
 12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?
 13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.
 14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.
 15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;
 16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

Jesus' words this morning tell us that we, the people of God, are not ready, We're expected to celebrate, and celebration will come soon enough, this week, in fact. But it's not time yet. We still mourn, and they think we're nuts We still mourn, because we haven't yet finished the work of Advent. We still mourn because our repentance and our cleansing are not complete.

But then Messiah came. He ate and he drank. He sat down with the sinners. He wasn't serious enough to satisfy them. They scorned Him as not 'religious' enough, not as solemn and dignified as He should be.

They knew what Messiah should be like, and it wasn't like either of these two. It had to be their way or no way at all.

Like them, we have the Scriptures. We have the God-given tradition. We are the ones He gave it to. We have time-honored, beautiful, and correct ways of worship.

In so many ways we are right, but, before we undertake the celebration of His birth, we need to ask this:

Chorazin and Bethsaida were Jewish cities.
 Their people were worshipers of the one true God.
 They gathered week by week, even day by day,
 in the synagogues to pray and to hear God's Word.
 They tried to organize their whole lives
 by the Law that God had given them.
 And the Messiah came and walked among them,
 and there were healings,
 and a few lives were changed,
 and they didn't know who he was,
 and went about their business as they always did,
 as if God really wasn't there at all.

John came fasting and calling for repentance,
 and they cried out in scorn.
 They criticized him for not celebrating with them.
 They thought he was crazy.

You know, there's a lot of pretty wild celebrating
 going on today.
 There are Christmas parties and Holiday parties
 everywhere.
 Most of the churches around us
 are keeping "Christmas Sunday" today.
 Our altar is dressed in somber purple.
 It's not the pretty Baby in the manger
 that we're thinking about.
 No, we're listening
 to some pretty scorching words.
 We're thinking about
 our own unworthiness to celebrate.
 We're thinking about
 His coming again in glory as judge.

17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly
 purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his
 garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire un-
 quenchable.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily

It's almost Christmas.
 Most of our Protestant brethren, in fact,
 are observing "Christmas Sunday".
 Anglicans don't do that.
 Why not?
 Advent is not yet over.
 The Church has one more reminder to give us
 that we, and our world,
 are not yet ready for the coming of the Lord.
 In this morning's lessons,
 we hear the prophet Isaiah,
 probably unaware that he spoke of John the Baptist,
 and we hear the Evangelist St. Luke,
 quoting those same words in their fulfillment,
 and both speak words that are comforting words,
 but at the same time terrifying.

Listen to Isaiah:

*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness,
 Prepare ye the way of the LORD,
 make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
 Every valley shall be exalted,
 and every mountain and hill shall be made low:
 and the crooked shall be made straight, and the
 rough places plain:*

*And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together:
for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

Ah! Promise, fulfillment, glory.
What an exciting message!
Victory is ahead!
... but, as he goes on

*All flesh is grass,
and all the goodliness thereof is
as the flower of the field:
The grass withereth, the flower fadeth:
because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it:
surely the people is grass.
The grass withereth, the flower fadeth:
but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*

Does that make us think a bit differently?
Is there rejoicing and triumph in those words?
Or are they words to make one tremble?
God, indeed, will triumph
... but will we?
or will we burn away?

John said the same thing, quoting Isaiah:

*Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths
straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be brought low;
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways shall be made smooth;
And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon,
they would have repented long ago in sackcloth
and ashes.

22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable
for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for
you.

23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto
heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the
mighty works, which have been done in thee, had
been done in Sodom, it would have remained until
this day.

24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable
for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than
for thee.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily

*Woe unto thee, Chorazin!
woe unto thee, Bethsaida!
for if the mighty works, which were done in you,
had been done in Tyre and Sidon,
they would have repented long ago in sackcloth
and ashes.*

Oof! That hurts!
These are the words of our loving Savior,
and he's speaking to two of the cities
that saw most of his mighty works.
That's what it says.

Second Lesson: Matt 11:11-24

Here beginneth the eleventh verse of the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

16 But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

17 And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

20 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were

But John never painted a rosy picture.
He went on, speaking to those
who considered themselves the chosen people of God:

*O generation of vipers,
who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

In other words,
"Have your teachers called you to repent?
Have you been warned that you are not ready?"

What an appropriate message for a time
when most people are gearing up
for a blast of a celebration,
and very few are thinking of
their own sins and shortcomings.

We aren't ready.
*"We have erred
and strayed from His ways like lost sheep.
We have followed too much
the devices and desires of our own hearts.
... There is no health in us."*

We just prayed that, and it's true.
The manger lies under the shadow of the Cross.
The Cross speaks a two-fold truth.
First and foremost, that God does not tolerate sin.
Our sin deserves His wrath
As John said:

*... the axe is laid unto the root of the trees:
every tree therefore
which bringeth not forth good fruit
is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

Remember this:
 that sweet baby we picture
 in the midst of the adoring animals,
 came as an answer to God's righteous wrath.
 Were we not in deep trouble by our own choices,
 He would not have needed to come.

But, thank God,
 the Cross and the manger speak
 of more than wrath.
 The second side of that message
 is of God's great love
 and of the redemption He offers.
 God looked down
 and in justice could only condemn, but

*So God loved the world
 that he gave his only-begotten Son,
 to the end that all that believe in him
 should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Listen to what John had to say.
 Repent.
 That means admit your sins. Proclaim your faults.
 Cry out to God for forgiveness,
 and by His help, change.
 The Baptizer gave practical instruction:
 Do right. Be honest. Be compassionate.
 Bring forth fruits that truly show repentance.
 To those who continue in their rebellion,
 John as fearsome words:

*[His] fan is in his hand,
 and he will thoroughly purge his floor,*

9 Behold, the former things are come to pass, and
 new things do I declare: before they spring forth I
 tell you of them.

10 Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise
 from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea,
 and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants
 thereof.

11 Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up
 their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let
 the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout
 from the top of the mountains.

12 Let them give glory unto the LORD, and declare
 his praise in the islands.

13 The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he
 shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall
 cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.

14 I have long time holden my peace; I have been
 still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a
 travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at
 once.

15 I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up
 all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands,
 and I will dry up the pools.

16 And I will bring the blind by a way that they
 knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have
 not known: I will make darkness light before them,
 and crooked things straight. These things will I do
 unto them, and not forsake them.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Isa 42:1-16

*Here beginneth the forty-second chapter
of the Prophet Isaiah.*

1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect,
in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit
upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the
Gentiles.

2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice
to be heard in the street.

3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking
flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth
judgment unto truth.

4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have
set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait
for his law.

5 Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the
heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread
forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he
that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and
spirit to them that walk therein:

6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness,
and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and
give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light
of the Gentiles;

7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners
from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out
of the prison house.

8 I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory
will I not give to another, neither my praise to
graven images.

*and will gather the wheat into his garner;
but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.*

For those who turn and who follow,
Isaiah has powerful words of hope:

*O Zion, that bringest good tidings,
get thee up into the high mountain;
O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings,
lift up thy voice with strength;
lift it up,
be not afraid;
say unto the cities of Judah,
Behold your God!*

Let us pray.

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and
come among us, and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we
are sore let and hindered in running the race that is
set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may
speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ
our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost,
be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

see also the sermon by Canon Hollister
under this date
in the Sermons by Other Authors

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Jer 33:7-16

*Here beginneth the seventh verse
of the thirty-third chapter of the Prophet Jeremiah.*

7 And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first.

8 And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.

9 And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.

10 Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast,

11 The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD.

It's almost Christmas.

This week we will celebrate his coming as the Babe of Bethlehem.

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

And we look forward to His ultimate coming to bring an end to the reign of sin.

As St. Paul said in the Second Lesson:

*... the Lord make you to increase and abound
in love one toward another,
and toward all men, even as we do toward you:
To the end he may stablish your hearts
unblameable in holiness before God,
even our Father,
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
with all his saints.*

Let us pray.

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

What if God has a different idea?
 Are we really ready to obey Him?
 When Adam and Eve sinned,
 they tried to hide from the sight of God.
 Does that work?
 As Isaiah asked:

*Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel,
 My way is hid from the LORD,
 and my judgment is passed over from my God?
 Hast thou not known?
 hast thou not heard,
 that the everlasting God, the LORD,
 the Creator of the ends of the earth,
 fainteth not, neither is weary?
 there is no searching of his understanding.*

"But I can't help it," we may say,
 or as Flip Wilson used to put it:
 "The Devil made me do it."

Nonsense.

We may be weak, but our God is strong.
 The Prophet went on:

*He giveth power to the faint;
 and to them that have no might
 he increaseth strength.
 Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
 and the young men shall utterly fall:
 But they that wait upon the LORD
 shall renew their strength;
 they shall mount up with wings as eagles;
 they shall run, and not be weary;
 and they shall walk, and not faint.*

12 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down.

13 In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the LORD.

14 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.

15 In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

16 In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: 1 Thes 1

*Here beginneth
the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians.*

1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.

7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

But is it?
Why is there so much to complain about?
What went wrong?
We did.

However we understand the details of Creation, The first three chapter of Genesis make it clear that God's plan was for a world filled with beauty and everything necessary to support a well-ordered life, and that man's desire to have his own way, in opposition to God's plan, messed everything up. The short word for that is --- "sin".

Isaiah delivers God's challenge to the people of his day, and to us as well:

"Oh, little man, who do you think you are?
Who are you in comparison with God?
Does He need your advice to run this world?"

In two verses the lectionary allows us to omit, he brings the point home.

In those days a man might decide to make himself an idol and worship it.
Was the image therefore God?
What power did it have?

We don't do that any more, but we build corporations, we make a career for ourselves, we build bigger and fancier houses, we develop just the entertainments we want, and our lives are full of the things we have made. Is that really any different?

Homily

What do you think
when you watch the evening news?
It seems
we have an overload of information these days.
We hear about events from all around the world,
and few of them are pleasant.
There are wars and rumors of wars,
famines, plagues and assorted thieveries.
We hear about an enormous amount
of hatred and strife,
and only a very little goodwill.
Why is that?
Is it true that there is nothing good worth reporting?
Why is so much of our thinking and conversation
given over to seemingly endless complaining?
What is the matter with this world?
What is the matter with us?

Did you hear the Prophet Isaiah this evening?
Did you find that lesson pleasant?
Or did it maybe shake you a little? It should.
We complain,
and, yes, there is a lot to complain about,
but who made this world anyway?
There was a widely distributed poster
a few years ago, that said:
"God don't make no junk."

Well, He doesn't.
At the end of the Sixth Day of Creation,
He looked on what he had made, and He said,
"It is very good".

10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he
raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered
us from the wrath to come.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily

The world around us is a flurry of activity.
Everyone around us
seems to be celebrating already.
Christmas lights are shining along the streets,
on the houses, in the stores.
Every store and every restaurant
seems to be filled with the season's music.
It seems that every business and every club
has already had its Yuletide party.
Ho, ho, ho, everywhere, but we ...
... we come to church
to find the same old somber purple hangings,
and we are being told that,
even though the church down the street
is doing Christmas Sunday,
it's not Christmas yet.
Do you feel the tension of that?
You should,
because that's just exactly why we aren't
doing Christmas this morning.

Jeremiah was looking ahead into his own future,
speaking to a people who would be in bondage.
For them freedom was to be only a memory,
a memory of something
that could hardly even be imagined.

That was the Hebrew people
under the Babylonian captivity,
a long, long time ago,
but, in a way,
he is also speaking to us in the here and now.

His words remind us that we, too, are in bondage.
We are in a world that has turned its back on God,
that has decided that each of us
should have his own way,
regardless of what God has declared to be His will.
It's easy to see that
when we look around at the creeping,
or should we say the rushing, tide of immorality,
the seeming disintegration of society,
the widespread denial of God Himself,
all the negative forces that surround us;
but that's not where we are called to look.
It is not the things happening around us
that enslave us,

As St. Paul wrote:

*"...neither death nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities nor powers.
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor height, nor depth,
nor any other creature,
shall be able to separate us from the love of God,
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:37-39)*

It is not the things happening around us
that enslave us,
but the things that we harbor within us.

31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew
their strength; they shall mount up with wings as
eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they
shall walk, and not faint.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: 1 Thes 3:7

*Here beginneth the seventh verse
of the third chapter of the First Epistle
of St. Paul to the Thessalonians.*

7 Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you
in all our affliction and distress by your faith:

8 For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

9 For what thanks can we render to God again for
you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your
sakes before our God;

10 Night and day praying exceedingly that we
might see your face, and might perfect that which
is lacking in your faith?

11 Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord
Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound
in love one toward another, and toward all men,
even as we do toward you:

13 To the end he may stablish your hearts un-
blameable in holiness before God, even our Father,
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his
saints.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

21 Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?

22 It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

23 That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.

24 Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.

25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

27 Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

Soon we will celebrate,
as those Jeremiah addressed were to celebrate,
but not just yet.

He writes to a people who are still in captivity,
who still deserve captivity because of their sins,
who mourn in fully deserved separation.

It is to them (and to us)
that He, speaking for God, says:

"I will cause them to return,
I will build them up,
I will cleanse them,
I will forgive their sins,
and there will be joy, and gladness,
and shouts of praise."

It's not Christmas

— not just yet,
nor has the Lord returned in glory
— not just yet.

We are still in a world not ready to receive Him
— not just yet,
and, if we are honest with ourselves,
and with Him,
we have to admit that we ourselves are not ready
— not just yet.

We wait.

We wait for His coming in power and great glory,
and because we wait
for that final and complete redemption,
we wait a few more days,
perhaps a bit impatiently,
feeling, perhaps,
a bit isolated from the celebrating world,

maybe a bit uncomfortable
at the somber nature of our worship today,
but we wait,
knowing that we still need redemption,
but that redemption is surely ahead.

As St. Paul said in the Second Lesson today:

*... ye ... having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.
... were ensamples to all that believe ...
... in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad;
... And [ye] wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead,
even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

Christmas is coming.
and so is His return.
May we, under his prodding and under his direction,
by the grace of His coming,
prepare a way for Him in our own hearts,
and in the world around us.

Let us pray.

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Isa 40:12-18, [19-20] 21-31

*Here beginneth the twelfth verse
of the fortieth chapter of the Prophet Isaiah.*

12 Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

13 Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him?

14 With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?

15 Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

16 And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.

17 All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

18 To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

[19 The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains.

20 He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved.]