

NEXT STEP: STUDY & SHARE

READINGS

Malachi 3:1-4

Luke 1:68-79

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us. (v78)

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-18

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming give to all the people of the world knowledge of your salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Savior & Lord, who lives & reigns with you & the Holy Spirit, one God, now & forever. Amen.

SERMON TEXT- Philippians 1:3-11

³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment & in the defense & confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more & more with knowledge & full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure & blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory & praise of God.

LISTENING TO ...

GOD- Christian life is rooted in the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit

- How does v6 connect to vv9-11? See Romans 12:2; Ephesians 2:10, 5:8-20; 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 5:21-23; 1 John 4:1; Revelation 19:7-8
- How is Jesus' promised return (v10) central or marginal to faithful Christians' doctrine & belief? See Matthew 16:24-27, 24:1-51, 25:1-46; Mark 13:1-8; Luke 12:35-40; John 14:1-6, 21:20-23; Acts 1:6-11; Romans 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 5:2; Colossians 3:4; 2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 9:28, 10:25; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 1:7

EACH OTHER- Sharing & growing with our brothers & sisters in Christ

- How does Jesus' promised return to judge the living & dead serve as a goal line or endpoint for your faith, giving order & structure to your faithfulness? How does it prepare you for its guaranteed happening?
- Consider *Philippians 4:4-9* as well. St. Paul writes from prison (*cf. 1:12-14*) yet he's filled with joy & encourages such in his readers. How do you cultivate & share this holy joy, even when everyday life's circumstances are poor? Do others recognize your joy or sharing of it? Ask people at church, work, or school. How can you be more in touch & open with this joy?

NEIGHBORS- Bearing fruit for those not yet our brothers & sisters

- The *Lutheran Study Bible* notes "Paul prays for the cause of salvation (knowledge, [full insight], through Jesus Christ) & the effect of salvation (love [overflowing], [determining what is best], blameless at Judgment Day)."¹ How can you do this for others? List 5 people (each for causes & effects) for whom you will pray daily at least until Epiphany (01.06.22). What will you specifically pray for each person?
- Too often Christians' incomplete status (v6) becomes an excuse for bad behavior & carelessness (*cf. vv9-11*) instead of a rally for repentance (& making necessary amends). How does your congregation discourage this cheap grace, "oh, well, too bad" lifestyle in favor of an open, public embrace of repentance & blamelessness for the sake of the Last Day? How can you embrace the same?

¹Various Authors, The Lutheran Study Bible, Concordia Publishing House, 2009, p2031, n1:9-11.

The Big Picture

*Incremental progress in a building project seems so slow;
the architect's illustrations give us focus*

-Notes-

KEY VERSE: It (*v1*)

-NEXT STEPS MEMORY VERSE-

Prepare the way of the Lord.

All flesh shall see the salvation of God. (*Luke 3:4, 6*)

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