***Introit (Psalm 81)***

P: A voice shouts in the desert,

C: Prepare the way for the Lord! Make His road straight!

P: The Lord says, My people, attend Me when I discipline you.

C: Israel, I want you to listen to Me.

P: I am the Lord your God. I saved you from Egypt.

C: Open your mouth and I will fill you with good things.

P: But My people didn’t listen to Me.

C: Israel didn’t obey Me.

P: I wish My people listened to Me.

C: I wish Israel followed Me.

**All: Glory give to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, the same as it was in the beginning, is now, and will continue forever. Amen.**

***Prayer for God’s Word***

P: O Lord, make our hearts eager and alive. Then we will be ready for Your only Son. And when He comes, we will have clean minds without sin and we can serve You. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Jesus lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: (copy) Amen.

The Old Testament lesson is from Malachi chapter 3.

The Lord of heaven says, “I will send My announcer and he will prepare the way for Me. You want the Lord? Quickly He will come to His temple. You are happy with the announcer of the promise. Look, He is coming!”

But when the Lord comes, can anyone accept that? When the Lord comes, can anyone stand in-front-of Him? He is the same-as a fire that melts and separates the good from the bad, or the same-as strong soap. And He will sit the same-as a man makes silver pure. He will make pure the sons of LEVI the same-as gold and silver. Then they will bring righteous offerings to the Lord. Then JUDAH’S offering and the city JERUSALEM’s offering will please the Lord the same-as years ago.

Then I will come to you and judge. I will quickly judge against the people doing magic and adultery and liars. I will judge against people who don’t give workers right pay, and people who oppress widows and orphans, and people who ignore foreigners, and they do not honor Me.

The Lord Almighty says this. I am the Lord, and I do not change. That is why I don’t destroy you children of JACOB. Your fathers and you all ignored My laws, and you didn’t obey. Come again to Me, and I will come to you. The Lord of Armies announces this.

This is the word of the Lord.

C: (copy) Thanks give to God.

The New Testament lesson is from Philippians chapter 1.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every time I remember you, I thank God for you. Every time I pray for you, I thank Him with happiness because you are partners in the gospel from the first day until now. I know God began a good work in you, and He will finish His work on the day that Christ Jesus comes.

That is right for me to be happy about you, because you are in my heart. All of us receive God’s grace together, no-matter if I am in prison or defending and announcing the gospel. God knows I tell the truth, because my deep feeling for you comes from the heart of Christ Jesus.

I pray that your love will continue growing more and more with true knowledge and all understanding. Then you can choose the best things, and you will continue pure and without blame until the day Christ comes. Your lives will be full of the righteous actions that Jesus Christ gives you. That gives glory and praise to God.

This is the word of the Lord.

C: (copy) Thanks give to God.

*You have two choices for the Gospel lesson, a shorter reading from Luke 3 and a longer reading from Luke 3. Choose one.*

*This is the shorter reading.*

The Gospel lesson is from Luke chapter 3.

C: (copy) Glory to You, O Lord.

God’s word came to JOHN, the son of ZECHARIAH, out in the desert. That happened during the fifteenth year TIBERIUS CAESAR reigned. PONTIUS PILATE was governor in JUDEA. HEROD was king in GALILEE. His brother PHILIP was king reigning ITUREA and TRACONITIS. LYSANIAS was king reigning ABILENE. ANNAS and CAIAPHAS were the Jewish high priests.

Then JOHN went and preached in the area near the river named JORDAN. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The prophet ISAIAH wrote about JOHN, “Someone is shouting in the desert: ‘Prepare the way for the Lord. Make His road straight. All the valleys must be filled-in level, and all the hills will be made low. The curvy roads will become straight, and the rough roads become smooth. All people will see God’s salvation.’”

Large crowds of people came to JOHN for baptism. JOHN said to them, “You snakes! Who warned you to escape from God’s anger? You should do good works that show you repent. Don’t say, ‘But Abraham is our father!’ I tell you that God can make these stones become children from Abraham. Now the axe is ready to cut-down the trees. If a tree doesn’t grow good fruit, God will cut-down that tree and throw it into the fire.”

The crowds of people asked JOHN, “Then what should we do?”

JOHN answered, “If a man has two coats, he should share with someone who has no coat. Let him also share his food.”

Some TAX collectors came to get baptized. They asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?”

JOHN answered, “Don’t collect more money than you should.”

Some soldiers also asked him, “What about us? What should we do?”

JOHN said, “Don’t force people to give you money. Don’t falsely accuse anyone. And be satisfied with your pay.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: (copy) Praise to You, O Christ.

*This is the longer reading.*

The Gospel lesson is from Luke chapter 3.

C: (copy) Glory to You, O Lord.

God’s word came to JOHN, the son of ZECHARIAH, out in the desert. That happened during the fifteenth year TIBERIUS CAESAR reigned. PONTIUS PILATE was governor in JUDEA. HEROD was king in GALILEE. His brother PHILIP was king reigning ITUREA and TRACONITIS. LYSANIAS was king reigning ABILENE. ANNAS and CAIAPHAS were the Jewish high priests.

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JOHN said, “Don’t force people to give you money. Don’t falsely accuse anyone. And be satisfied with your pay.”

All the people were waiting and wondering about JOHN, if maybe JOHN was the Christ (Savior). But JOHN told them, “I use water to baptize you. But someone more important than me is coming. I am not good enough to carry His shoes. He will use the Holy Spirit and fire to baptize you. He has His farmer’s shovel to separate the WHEAT and the CHAFF. He will put the WHEAT in His BARN. But He will burn the CHAFF with fire that never ends.”

JOHN encouraged the people and preached good news to them. King HEROD took his brother’s wife named HERODIAS and married her. JOHN told HEROD that was wrong, and he corrected HEROD for doing many evil things. Then HEROD put JOHN in prison.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: (copy) Praise to You, O Christ.