A reading from Genesis 2:4b-6, 8-9, 16-17

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These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’

Listen for God’s Word

**Our Hearts are Open**

**Prayer**

Creating God, you call us to live in harmony with nature, one another, and with you. Now fix our eyes upon the one in whom your purpose for the world has been revealed, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

A reading from Genesis 3:1-9, 22-24

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God say, “You shall not eat from any tree in the garden”?’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.” ’ But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’

Then the Lord God said, ‘See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever’— therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Listen for God’s word

**Our Hearts are Open**

**Prayer**

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A reading from Prophet Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people,
   says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
   and cry to her
that she has served her term,
   that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord’s hand
   double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:
‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
   make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
   and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
   and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
   and all people shall see it together,
   for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’

A voice says, ‘Cry out!’
   And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’
All people are grass,
   their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
   when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
   surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
   but the word of our God will stand for ever.
Get you up to a high mountain,
   O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
   O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
   lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
   ‘Here is your God!’
See, the Lord God comes with might,
   and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
   and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
   he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
   and gently lead the mother sheep.

Listen for God’s word

**Our Hearts are Open**

**Prayer**

God our hope, hear again the cry of exiles, imprisoned in a dark land of war, hunger, and intolerance. Come among us with strength and healing and bring us back to the world of your just and holy purpose. We ask this through Jesus Christ the Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

A reading from Prophet Isaiah 65:17-25

For I am about to create new heavens
   and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
   or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice for ever
   in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
   and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
   and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
   or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
   an infant that lives but a few days,
   or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
   and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
   they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
   they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
   and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labour in vain,
   or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
   and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer,
   while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
   the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
   but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
   on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Listen for God’s word

**Our Hearts are Open**

**Prayer**

 God of gentleness and peace, teach our hands to shun the tools of violence and our minds to conceive the paths of peace, that we may know with thanksgiving the joy of your generosity, made known to us in Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A reading from Luke 1:5-25

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’ Zechariah said to the angel, ‘How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.’ The angel replied, ‘I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.’

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, ‘This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.’

Listen for God’s word

**Our Hearts are Open**

**Prayer**

Almighty God you called John the Baptist to give witness to the coming of your Son and to prepare his way. Give your people wisdom to see your purpose, and openness to hear your will, that we too may witness to Christ’s coming and so prepare his way; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A reading from Luke 1:26-38

 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.

Listen for God’s word

**Our Hearts are Open**

**Prayer**

Pour your grace into our hearts, O Lord, that we who have known the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ, announced by an angel to the Virgin Mary, may by his cross and passion be brought to the glory of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A reading from John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

Listen for God’s word

**Our Hearts are Open**

**Prayer**

Eternal Wisdom, creating, ordering, and saving, we give thanks that we have seen you in the selfless love of Jesus Christ. Now reign within our minds and hearts, and mobilize our wills, that by your power and through our hands this world may be re-made to be the garden and the city of your glory. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.