

Home Worship December 20th 4th Sunday of Advent

Welcome to worship. I hope you will watch for our special Christmas Eve video with message and music this Thursday. There are plans for music and other voices from the church sanctuary. Just a note to say that the sermon printed here may not always have the same dynamic as the Face book video version.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, whose forgiveness is sure and whose steadfast love endures forever. **Amen.**

Together let us honestly and humbly confess that we have not lived as God desires.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Loving and forgiving God, we confess that we are held captive by sin. In spite of our best efforts, we have gone astray. We have not welcomed the stranger; we have not loved our neighbor; we have not been Christ to one another. Restore us, O God. Wake us up and turn us from our sin. Renew us each day in the light of Christ. Amen.

People of God, hear this glad news: by God's endless grace your sins are forgiven, and you are free—free from all that holds you back and free to live in the peaceable realm of God.

May you be strengthened in God's love, ☩ comforted by Christ's peace, and accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Advent Candle Lighting

4 Light four candles to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness.
He is coming, tell the glad tidings. Let your lights be shining!

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Instead of David building a house (temple) for God, God promises to establish David's house (dynasty) forever. Centuries later, after the Babylonian exile, no king sat on the throne. Even then, however, the people of Israel remembered this promise and continued to hope for a king, the messiah, God's anointed.

¹Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." ³Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." ⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

¹Your love, O LORD, forever will I sing; from age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness.

²**For I am persuaded that your steadfast love is established forever; you have set your faithfulness firmly in the heavens.**

³"I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn an oath to David my servant:

⁴**'I will establish your line forever, and preserve your throne for all generations.'**"

¹⁹You spoke once in a vision and said to your faithful people: "I have set the crown upon a warrior and have exalted one chosen out of the people.

²⁰**I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him.**

²¹My hand will hold him fast and my arm will make him strong.

²²**No enemy shall deceive him, nor shall the wicked bring him down.**

²³I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.

²⁴**My faithfulness and steadfast love are with him, and he shall be victorious through my name.**

²⁵I will set his hand on the sea, and his right hand on the rivers.

²⁶**He will say to me, ‘You are my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.’**

Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27

Paul closes his letter to the Romans by praising God because, in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God has revealed the promised, divine plan of salvation for all humanity. Paul proclaims this gospel of Christ in order to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations.

²⁵Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

The Holy Gospel according to Luke 1:26-38 Glory to you O Lord

In this annunciation, Luke makes clear that God comes with good news for ordinary people from little known places. This king will not be born to royalty in a palace, but to common folk in a stall. Here Luke highlights the role of the Spirit, a special emphasis in this gospel.

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He 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. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵The 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. ³⁶And 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. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸Then 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. The word of the Lord.....**Praise to you O Christ**

Sermon

There is a famous story of a young black boy who was walking in the street holding his mother's hand. They lived in South Africa in 1940, the time of Apartheid. It was the law that a black person who passed a white person on the street must step aside and let the white person pass. The boy and his mother saw a white man approaching them. They prepared to step aside. To their surprise, the white man stepped off the sidewalk and tipped his hat to the boy's mother in a sign of respect and honor.

The boy was shocked. He and his mother walked down the center of the sidewalk and smiled at the man. "Mother," he asked, "Why did that man stand aside for us and tip his hat? I thought that white men didn't do that? Why didn't he want us to step aside?" "Because, my son, that man is a man of God," his mother answered. "That man is a priest."

It was then and there that the little boy decided what he would do with his life. He would also become a priest. His name was Desmond Tutu. Desmond Tutu is one of South Africa's most well-known human rights activists, winning the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in resolving and ending apartheid.

It is often the smallest acts of surrender, when we give up control rather than try to take it, that we allow God to enter the world in the most powerful ways. Mary did not try to seize power. She did not desire fame or acknowledgement. She just agreed to let herself become an instrument of something more than herself. She stepped aside so God could step in.

I am reminding of the serenity prayer from Alcoholics Anonymous, *"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."* Sometimes the most holy thing that we can do is to step aside so that God can show us what to do. Sometimes the most sacred act is to accept the things we cannot change, for it gives God the space to step into the vortex and act.

God's solutions to the human predicament are so much more than we could ever come up with. Mary knew this. She knew that her greatest joy was not to try to do things her way, but to be an instrument in God's great master plan, to be the one to step aside. It was her greatest joy to be of service to God. Mary's humble acceptance led to the birth of the savior of the world. This was not an act of weakness but the greatest kind of strength. It takes courage to let God be God.

In this time of pandemic, of pain and loss and isolation, I wish that I could be the one to cure the corona virus. I wish that I could solve the divisions in this country and heal the earth of the pollution and plastic that plagues our oceans. In a smaller way, I wish that I could be the one to convince the alcoholic to go to rehab, to comfort the lonely and bring joy into peoples' lives.

More than likely, God is asking me to be the one who steps aside so that God can do these things, to listen, to tip my hat and honor the ones who come after me, the young people with new ideas and innovation that are mind blowing. Maybe I am to be the one who quietly

and reverently says, *"Yes. Let it be with me according to your will."*

Show me the path, O Lord, and I will walk on it. Make it not my path but yours. Make it not my solution but yours. Make it not my agenda but yours, not my ideas but yours. For you alone know how we are to proceed as a human race. You alone know how we are to learn to love. Make me like Mary, eager to let you take center stage. Make me like Mary, willing to give you everything that I am and have so that you may show your love in our broken world.

Help me step aside, O Lord. Help me step aside. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

God of power and might, fulfill your promise and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need. ***A brief silence.*** Gracious God, all generations' call you blessed. In this holy season we pray for our neighbors of other denominations and faiths. Inspire the faith of their people. Cultivate understanding among us and strengthen us in love and service to our community. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Righteous God, you humble the powerful and lift up the lowly. We pray for the leaders of all nations, that they amplify the voices of people in need. Guide all people entrusted with leadership, to create societies in which everyone can flourish.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Compassionate God, you fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty. Nourish those who lack access to adequate food and nutrition. Bless the work of advocates, community organizers, and food pantries. Encourage others to provide for their neighbors in need. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Healing God, you pour out mercy to all who cry out to you. Surround everyone in need of healing in body, mind, or spirit with your tender presence ***(especially Jodee Bardell, Joyce Greenawalt, Lisa Miller and Brad Shippert. We pray for the families suffering with the coronavirus and we pray for an end to the virus with safe vaccinations and treatments. We pray for those in care facilities: Sibyl, Barb, Tammy, Trudy, Jessica, Hazel, Jeanne and Linda. We pray for those in military service: Logan, JJ, Bryan, Dustin, Brad and Travis).*** Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, you are faithful to the promises you made to our forebears. Inspire others with their steadfast witness. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Offering

Generous God, you have created all that is, and you provide for us in every season. Bless all that we offer, that through these gifts the world will receive your blessing. In the name of Jesus, Emmanuel, we pray. **Amen.**

Gathered into one by the power of the Holy Spirit we pray as Jesus taught the disciples...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Even as we watch and wait, Christ is here. Come, eat and drink.

Holy Communion Together

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You comforted your people with the promise of the Redeemer, through whom you will also make all things new in the day when he comes to judge the world in righteousness.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Take your bread/wafer	The body of Christ given for you
Take you juice/wine	The blood of Christ shed for you
The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in His grace.	

Prayer after Communion

Gracious and abundant God, you have done great things for us, and we rejoice. In this bread and cup you give us life forever. In your boundless mercy, strengthen us and open our hearts to the world's needs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Blessing

The Creator of the stars bless your Advent waiting, the long-expected Savior fill you with love, the unexpected Spirit guide your journey, ☩ now and forever. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Thank you for your offerings

As Advent comes to an end, I wish you a Merry Christmas. May you see God's goodness all around you in your many blessings.

Stay in touch if you or someone you know needs help and or prayer.