**The Church of the Divine Love**

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

**DECEMBER 18, 2022 10:15 A.M.**

**HOLY EUCHARIST, RITE II**

*Please observe silence*

 THE WORD OF GOD

 Prayer before Worship – on insert

 Processional Hymn #**56 – O come, O come, Emmanuel**

Opening Acclamation page 355

 Collect for Purity page 355

 Kyrie page 356

 Collect of the Day - lectionary sheet insert

 First Lesson: **Isaiah 7:10-16**

 Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

Second Lesson: **Romans 1:1-7**

Gradual Hymn **#66 – Come, thou long expected Jesus**

 Gospel: **Matthew 1:18-25**

 Sermon – The Rev. Jean Lenord Quatorze

 Nicene Creed page 358

 Prayers of the People, FormVI page 392

 The Peace

 Welcome and Announcements

 THE HOLY COMMUNION

 Offertory Hymn **#270 – Gabriel’s message does away**

Doxology (sung)

 The Great Thanksgiving:

 Eucharistic Prayer D page 372

 Sanctus (S-130 in hymnal) page 373

 The Lord’s Prayer page 364

 The Breaking of the Bread, Anthem & Prayer page 337

 The Communion of the People

 Communion Hymn **#496 – How bright appears the Morning Star**

 Post Communion Prayer page 365

 Prayer for Peace – on insert

 Prayer of St. Francis page 833

 Dismissal Hymn #**265 – The angel Gabriel from heaven came**

 Dismissal

 **Sermon Sunday December 18, 2022**

Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7,16-18; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

**Sisters and brothers in Christ,**

An unmarried woman. An unplanned pregnancy. An implausible explanation. It’s not hard to imagine what others were saying and thinking. Did you hear? Mary’s pregnant. I never expected this. Mary and Joseph should know better. They aren’t even married yet. Well, I heard that Joseph’s not even the father. How could she do that to him? He’s such a good and just man. Who is the father? They say Joseph still intends to take her as his wife. He’s going to marry her after all this. This whole thing is a disgrace. She and her love child should be stoned. The law requires it.

I am sure Joseph heard the whispers and saw the looks, if not in the village, then certainly in his own imagination. Joseph knows this a scandal. He knows there are questions of faithfulness. The love child in Mary’s womb proves that. By the light of day, it all seems pretty clear. Joseph will awake in the morning and do what he has to do. He will quietly send Mary away. What appears to be one thing in the light of public scrutiny, however, becomes another in the night of silence, listening, and waiting.

Yes, this a scandal. But it is not a scandal of immorality. The real scandal is that God is with us. We thought God was up there, or out there, maybe somewhere in the future. But then Mary got pregnant. The scandal of that pregnancy is that God is intimately present. God’s holy spirit fills the womb of Mary. The wind of God is blowing through her life. The breath of God in her is so real that she begins to show like the pregnant woman she is. The scandal is that humanity can become pregnant with God. The big scandal and shock of this story are not that a virgin is pregnant and gives birth. The real scandal is that God is with us. The shocker is that God through Mary takes on flesh and blood and comes to us. God is flesh and blood real. That means God is with us in people, relationships, ideas, opportunities, vocations, dreams. So why would we dismiss them? God is with you. God is with me. God is with them. God is with us in all the circumstances and situations of our life; in joy and sorrow; in celebration and grieving, in success and failure, in hope and repair; in courage and parlaying fair. You name it, God is there with us. That’s the point of this story. Sometimes, however, the truth of what is gets lost or ignored in our attempts to explain how it is, to make sense of it, to make it conform to our understanding.

Take a moment and look at the last week of your life, the last month, the last year. Who are the people you’ve dismissed? What relationships or opportunities have you quietly abandoned? What dreams have you walked away from? What happened? Why do we do that? Somewhere in those people, relationships, opportunities, and dreams there was something that made no sense. An explanation was lacking. Something didn’t match our experiences or expectations. We couldn’t understand what was happening. We didn’t know what to do. We couldn’t get straight in our head how it could all work out so we let it go, walked away. Another quiet dismissal. In the end we struggled, whether consciously or unconsciously, to recognize and believe Emmanuel, God with us. Yes, Mary’s pregnancy raises questions of faithfulness. But it is not the usual question or accusation of betrayal and infidelity. Rather, this pregnancy is a statement of God’s faithfulness and commitment to God’s people. In this pregnancy God renews all the covenants of history and again chooses us to be his people. God’s continuing promise to show up and live in the midst of our lives is fulfilled in Mary’s pregnancy. This pregnancy is fleshly faithfulness. Yes, the child within Mary is a love child. That is not, however, a euphemism for illegitimate, a child born to unmarried parents. No, this child is the revelation of God’s love for humanity. Love that can be seen, heard, touched. This embodied love of God will feed and nourish God’s people.

Joseph’s daytime resolution to quietly dismiss Mary has given way to a night of dreaming, pondering, and wrestling. Joseph’s view of Mary, her pregnancy, even himself has been enlarged and opened. He has begun to see this situation, this scandalous pregnancy, through the eyes of faith rather than the stares of the villagers. Mary’s story and the angel’s words now speak louder than the villagers’ voices. The only reason this could happen is because Joseph entrusted himself to the night, to the inner world where angels appear, guide, and speak God’s word. The night of faith shows reality to be more than the daytime drama with which we often live. It is the place where God speaks the truth about us and sees more than we sometimes see for ourselves. It is the night of Emmanuel. Joseph experienced God with him. He found holiness hidden, where it has always been hidden, in plain sight amongst the scandals, the talk, the looks, the questions and doubts.

So, Joseph awoke in the morning and did what he had to do. He began emptying himself. He let go of fear. He let go of the villagers’ voices and stares. He let go of his doubts and questions. He let go of his own reputation and standing in the community. He let go of his ideas and hopes for what his marriage to Mary could have been. He let go of the law and punishment. With each letting go Joseph emptied himself so that, by God’s grace and mercy, he might become the womb that would protect, nourish, and provide security to Mary and her child. He would be the womb that sheltered Mary and Jesus from Herod’s rage and the slaughter of the innocents. He would be the womb that safely took Mary and Jesus to Egypt. He would be the womb that sustained their lives in that land. He would be the womb that brought them back to Nazareth when the time was right. Isn’t that what wombs do? They are the place where life is created and sustained, nourished, and grown. They offer security and protection. They are that deep interior place where God’s life and breath meet and unite with ours to create something beautiful and sacred. The womb Joseph offered was as important as the one Mary offered. Even as God was acting in Mary’s womb to create new life, divine-human life, so God was acting in Joseph’s womb to sustain that life.

At one level today’s gospel is about Mary and Joseph but at another level it is about you and me. It is about us becoming more open and receptive, more womb-like in this final week of Advent so that we all might give birth to God’s Son in our time and our culture. Joseph guides us to Christmas reminding us that before a womb can be filled it must first be empty. He invites to enter the night of faith and to begin emptying ourselves of all that keeps our womb closed. We must let go of all those things that make our womb inaccessible. Things like fear, guilt, resentment and anger, the villagers’ voices and stares, the thoughts that say we are not enough, the doubts of God’s presence, the isolation and loneliness of loss and sorrow. Letting go creates space, openness, and opportunity for God.

Over and over, we let go, emptying ourselves until we find that we are nothing and have nothing. That nothingness is our empty womb offered with scandalous faith that it will be filled with God, we will be re-created, the world will hear good news, and once again we will discover God is with us**. AMEN!**

 4 ADVENT 10:15 AM HOLY EUCHARIST, RITE II (also on zoom)

 COFFEE HOUR FOLLOWS

 MONDAY 8:00 AM AA MEETING

 WEDNESDAY 7:00 PM AL-ANON MEETING

 THURSDAY 10AM-2PM THRIFT SHOP CHRISTMAS SALE

 8:00 PM AA MEETING

 SATURDAY – CHRISTMAS EVE THRIFT SHOP CLOSED

 7:00 PM HOLY EUCHARIST, RITE II

 CHRISTMAS DAY 10:15 AM HOLY EUCHARIST, RITE II (also on zoom)

SUPPORT THE FOOD PANTRY – DROP OFF IN THE KITCHEN

 Today Next Week

Eucharistic Minister Anthony Giordano Jess Berbeck

Coffee Hour Judy Golden

 **PARISH PRAYER LIST**

Give to all who suffer the refreshing waters of your compassion and healing. Make them dwell in the safety of your care even in the midst of all that troubles them. Especially we remember before you:

Grace Schinella Harriet Capers Bob Curley

John Mulligan Arlene Goodenough Celeste

Chris Dickson Kate Jones Deb P.

Michael Echevarria John Rocco Gabriel

Barbara Stinson Michael & Family Warren

Charlotte H. Bernie Walther Anthony

Mo (Rachael) Bill Conklin Sr. Carolyn

Anthony Paribello Barbara Curran Del

Ciara Robert Sweat Aidan

Elodie Sophia Carol K.

People of Haiti Christopher & Family Julia

Mary & Family People of Ukraine Tim

Nathan Treadwell Richard & Family Art

Margaret Victims of Hurricanes

Help us speak words of encouragement and offer deeds of kindness to them. Bring us with them, into the unending joy of your kingdom. Amen

Prayer before Worship

Almighty God, who pours out on all who desire it, the

spirit of grace. Deliver us, when we draw near to you,

from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that

with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may

worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ

our Lord. Amen

Storms and Hurricanes

O God, you rule over all creation, which you have set free

to act according to its nature. We know and love your world, which is also a world of randomness and chance. You are

Lord of chaos as well as order. We pray to you for people

caught in storms and hurricanes. We remember particularly

those whose work is dangerous, police and firefighters,

rescue workers of all kinds. You are known in storm and in

calm, you are Lord of thunders, you moved across the hills

of Judea. You are also a presence in stillness, a voice from

silence. You spoke to Job in the whirlwind and quieted the

Sea of Galilee. Wherever we are, in storm or calm, we know your presence. Call us sometimes to storm, sometimes to calm, sometimes to wilderness, sometimes to silence. Call

us always to yourself, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Prayer for Peace

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn

but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that

all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince

of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominions

and glory, now and for ever. Amen