

Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 20, 2020

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

God keeps the promise made to David to give him an everlasting throne. The angel tells Mary that God will give David's throne to her son Jesus. She is perplexed by Gabriel's greeting and by the news of her coming pregnancy, but she is able still to say, "Count me in." We who know that Jesus is called king only as he is executed still find it a mystery hard to fathom, but with Mary today we hear the news of what God is up to and say, "Count us in."



WELCOME TO WORSHIP

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

BLESSING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

Let us pray ... We praise you, O God, for this circle of light that marks our days of preparation for Christ's advent. As we light the candles on this wreath, kindle within us the fire of your Spirit, that we may be light shining in the darkness. Enlighten us with your grace, that we may welcome others as you have welcomed us. Grant this through Christ our Lord, whose coming is certain and whose day draws near. **Amen.**

Light three candles on a wreath, a circle of candles or use the "candles" provided as we pray or sing:

**Light one candle to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness.
He shall bring salvation to Israel, God fulfills the promise.**

**Light two candles to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness.
He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, gently lead them homeward.**

**Light three candles to watch for Messiah: let your light banish darkness.
Lift your heads and lift high the gateway for the King of glory.**

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

GREETING & PRAYER OF THE DAY

From the one who was, who is, and who is to come: Grace and peace be with you all.

And also with you.

Let us pray ... 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.

HYMN

“Unexpected and Mysterious”

Please read the hymn or pray the verse as the hymn is sung.

**Unexpected and mysterious is the gentle word of grace.
Ever-loving and sustaining is the peace of God's embrace.
If we falter in our courage and we doubt what we have known,
God is faithful to console us as a mother tends her own.**

GOSPEL: Luke 1:26-38

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.

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, favored 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 favor 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 forever, 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.

**In a momentary meeting of eternity and time,
Mary learned that she would carry both the mortal and divine.
Then she learned of God's compassion, of Elizabeth's great joy,
and she ran to greet the woman who would recognize her boy.**

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Word of God. Word of life.

Thanks be to God.

**We are called to ponder myst'ry and await the coming Christ,
to embody God's compassion for each fragile human life.
God is with us in our longing to bring healing to the earth,
while we watch with joy and wonder for the promised Savior's birth.**

Text: Jeannette M. Lindholm, b. 1961

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ANNUNCIATION & MAGNIFICAT (Luke 1:46-55—from “Holden Evening Prayer)

An angel went from God to a town called Nazareth to a woman whose name was Mary. The angel said to her, “Rejoice, O highly favored, for God is with you. You shall bear a child, and his name shall be Jesus, the Chosen One of God Most High.” And Mary said, “I am the servant of my God, I live to do your will.”

My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you. You have looked with love on your servant here, and blessed me all my life through.

Great and mighty are you, O Holy One, strong is your kindness evermore. How you favored the weak and lowly one, humbling the proud of heart.

You have cast the mighty down from their thrones, and uplifted the humble of heart. You have fill the hungry with wondrous things and left the wealthy no part.

Great and mighty are you, O Faithful One, strong in your justice, strong your love.

As you promised to Sarah and Abraham, kindness forevermore.

My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you. You have looked with love on your servant here, and blessed me all my life through.

SECOND READING: Romans 16:25-27 (The Message)

All our praise rises to the One who is strong enough to make you strong, exactly as preached in Jesus Christ, precisely as revealed in the mystery kept secret for so long but now an open book through the prophetic scriptures. All the nations of the world can now know the truth and be brought into obedient belief, carrying out the orders of God, who got all this started, down to the very last letter. All our praise is focused through Jesus on this incomparably wise God. Yes!!

Word of God. Word of life.

Thanks be to God.

HOMILY

HYMN

“Blessed Be the God of Israel”

Please sing the hymn or pray the verses.

**Blessed be the God of Israel who comes to set us free
and raises up new hope for us: a Branch from David’s tree.
So have the prophets long declared that with a mighty arm
God would turn back our enemies and all who wish us harm.**

**With promised mercy will God still the covenant recall,
the oath once sworn to Abraham, from foes to save us all;
that we might worship without fear and offer lives of praise,
in holiness and righteousness to serve God all our days.**

**My child, as prophet of the Lord you will prepare the way,
to tell God’s people they are saved from sin’s eternal sway.
Then shall God’s mercy from on high shine forth and never cease
to drive away the gloom of death and lead us into peace.**

Text: Carl P. Daw Jr., b. 1944, based on Luke 1:68-79

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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.

Creator God, you scatter the proud. Everything we have belongs first to you. Bless and protect the seas, mountains, plains, forests, skies, and soils that surround us. Give us humility as we tend them. 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 Bill, Joan, LaVerne, Velma and Nanette. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Eternal God, you are faithful to the promises you made to our forebears. We give thanks for the ministry of our ancestors who organized, planned, dreamed, encouraged, and reached out as they served you. We give thanks for the bold leadership of female leaders in our own time. 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.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered as one in Christ, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

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.

BENEDICTION

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.

HYMN

“The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns”

Please sing the hymn or pray the verses.

**The King shall come when morning dawns and light triumphant breaks,
when beauty gilds the eastern hills and life to joy awakes.**

**Not as of old a little child, to bear and fight and die,
but crowned with glory like the sun that lights the morning sky.**

**Oh, brighter than the rising morn when Christ, victorious, rose
and left the lonesome place of death, despite the rage of foes.**

**Oh, brighter than that glorious morn shall dawn upon our race
the day when Christ in splendor comes, and we shall see his face.**

**The King shall come when morning dawns and light and beauty brings.
Hail, Christ the Lord! Your people pray: come quickly, King of kings.**

Text: John Brownlie, 1859-1925
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DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.