

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

‘FOURTH SUNDAY of ADVENT’

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We sing of the steadfast love of the Lord.
All: **We proclaim God’s faithfulness to all.**
One: The faithfulness and steadfast love of God
have come to dwell among us in Jesus Christ.
All: **The Lord is our God,
the Rock of our salvation.**

***OPENING HYMN** “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” GtG 82

1. **Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us;
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.**
2. **Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1744
Music: HYFRYDOL, Rowland Hugh Prichard, 1830;
harm. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God of compassion, have mercy upon us. You send forth your Spirit, yet we ignore your counsel. Christ dwells among us, yet we fail to obey him. We sing of peace on earth, yet hostility continues. Angels herald good tidings, yet we commit evil deeds. Forgive our deliberate and indirect misuse of your graciousness. Come to us again and again, and prepare us to receive Christ in our hearts and lives. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from Luke 2)*

One: In this is love, that God gives us the gift of Jesus Christ to remind us of the truth of Immanuel: that God is with us.
All: **This is indeed “good news of great joy for all the people.”**
One: So rejoice and be glad, for in Jesus Christ we are loved, in Jesus Christ we are embraced, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.
All: **“Glory to God in the highest heaven!”**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.
All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH: The Candle of Love

One: During this Advent season, we affirm that God came down to dwell in our midst in a baby born in Bethlehem.
All: **This one born of Mary fulfills our hope, is our peace, and gives us joy. He is the embodiment of God's love for us.**
One: So today we light the fourth Advent candle to remind us that "God loved the world so much that God gave God's only Son." (John 3:16) Let us rejoice and be glad, for in Jesus Christ we are loved.

Let us pray.

(continued...)

Unison: **Dear God, we are amazed at the love you have for us: a love so great that you gave us your Son, Jesus. As he embodies your love for us, so may we, in our thoughts and words and deeds, embody your love for others, not only during this season, but always. Amen.**

Sing: **Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling;
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion;
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1747, alt.
Music: BEECHER, John Zundel, 1870
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SCRIPTURE READINGS II Samuel 7:1-11,16
 Luke 1:26-38; 46-55

II SAMUEL 7:1-11,16 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² the 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." ³ Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you."

⁴ But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: ⁵ Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶ I 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. ⁷ Wherever 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?" ⁸ Now 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; ⁹ and I have been with you wherever you went, and I 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. ¹⁰ And 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, ¹¹ from 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. ... ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

LUKE 1:26-38 (New Revised Standard Version)

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

LUKE 1:46-55 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁴⁶ *And Mary said,*
⁴⁷ *"My soul magnifies the Lord,*
⁴⁸ *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*
⁴⁹ *for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's servant.*
⁵⁰ *Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;*
⁵¹ *for the Mighty One has done great things for me,*
⁵² *and holy is the name of the Lord.*
⁵³ *God's mercy is for those who revere God*
⁵⁴ *from generation to generation.*
⁵⁵ *God has shown strength with God's arm;*
⁵⁶ *and has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.*
⁵⁷ *The Lord has brought down the powerful from their thrones,*
⁵⁸ *and lifted up the lowly;*
⁵⁹ *has filled the hungry with good things,*
⁶⁰ *and sent the rich away empty.*
⁶¹ *God has helped God's servant Israel,*
⁶² *in remembrance of the mercy of the Lord,*
⁶³ *according to the promise God made to our ancestors,*
⁶⁴ *to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “God’s Flip and Cue” by Pastor Bill Vincent

II Samuel 7 may not be the typical passage we would think of for this season. Yet it reminds us of Jesus’ roots in David. And his fulfillment of that promise made to David.

And maybe so much more.
His fulfillment of the people’s hope: what came to be known as the Messianic hope. ‘Messiah’: the Hebrew word. In the Greek, the word is ‘Christ’. Meaning “anointed one.”

One anointed. One appointed. One chosen. Like a prophet, priest...or king.

David has risen to prominence as king – the legitimate, God-chosen king – over the people of Israel.

David is set in his kingdom and settled in his palace.

Then he has an idea: to build a house for God.

But God has other plans: to build a house for David.

There’s a play on the word ‘house’.

David wants to build God a house: a temple. God will build David a house: a dynasty.

So there’s this flip that takes place.

David is not to build. God will build.

And that flip is based on God’s work, founded on God’s initiative, God’s choice – God’s unconditional grace.

Like with Mary.

Whatever picture we have of Mary, the passage makes clear that

none of her qualities is offered as the reason God chose her. (Fred Craddock, Luke, Interpretation series, p.28)

No reason is given for her being chosen. It is simply God’s choice, God’s initiative, God’s action, God’s unconditional grace.

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you....”

“Are you the one to build me a house to live in?” God asks of David.

Then God lists all these things God has done:

I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name...

And then the climax:

I will make you a house...forever.

God’s action. God’s initiative.

Fundamentally, it is the meaning behind the virgin birth: that this is God’s doing, God’s possibility; not ours.

It's what we celebrate at Christmas: God's initiative, God's choice, God's unearned gift given because of God's gracious doing.

But what about us?
Where do we fit in?
Are we nothing but a passive vessel for God to pour into?

Remember: David was ready to do something.
Yes, the driving force in this story is God's gracious action.
But what about what we can offer?
What can we do?
What need we to do?

God's coming in Jesus expects, invites – demands? – a response.
For it seems to me that Christmas is not distant, far away, unconnected to us. It is not about hearing the story and saying, "Isn't that nice!" then sitting back and doing nothing.

If we really hear this story, then we will want to share it; we will want to engage it; we will want to spread it; we will be eager to live it.

And we will respond in joy, through peace, in hope, with love.

For truly to hear the Christmas story – in all its dimensions – is to be touched by God's initiative, God's love; and to be changed as a people who know that all-embracing love and live that all-encompassing love; a people who strive to live in harmony with that 'over all people' love and that 'over every aspect of life' love.

But what is key is that our response must always be guided by God's prior action.

You see, David wants to build a house for God.

God says, No, I will build you a house for you.

And note: that is a major redirecting of time and energy; a "give you a crick in the neck" shift of focus and vision.

And to follow that re-directing – to act in harmony with that reversal – we have got to take our cue from God.

For it is one thing to build a temple – a house for God.

It is another thing entirely to 'build' a dynasty: a legacy, a family, a community.

God says to David, No, I will build you a house, a dynasty, a family. And then it is as if God says to David, "Now, like the shepherd you used to be, tend to that house, pastor that family, nurture that community." Nurture it, shape it, form it, grow it up; and send it on its way, which is God's way.

And yes, we may know how well David did with that task and calling: from taking advantage of Bathsheba, to a rebellion by his son Absalom. Not a great record.

Still, David tried.

And that trying involves listening and paying attention...and taking our cue from God.

For when God speaks about “*bringing up the people from Egypt*” – freeing the people from slavery by the oppressor – we have to take our cue from God.

When the one whose birth we celebrate – Son of David, who establishes the throne forever – comes from peasant folk – some of the least of the people – and not from the royalty and upper crust of his day, we have to take our cue from God.

When this itinerant preacher encourages men and women – and children – when he encourages a Pharisee and a tax collector, encourages even Nicodemus and Judas, to follow him and learn from him and pursue him, we have to take our cue from our Lord.

When the one the disciples call Master stoops before them and washes their feet, and speaks of serving and not being served, we have to take our cue from our Lord.

When he goes toward the suffering and not away from it...

When his heart goes out to a widow from Nain, and a man beaten on the road and left for dead, and a lost son who comes to his senses...

When he gives his life for them...

When God comes to their aid “*in remembrance of mercy*”...

...we have to take our cue from God.

For this is the way to know that joy of which we speak.

This is the way to find that peace for which we long.

This is the way to share that hope in which we invest.

For this is the way to engage and embrace that Child: that one born in a manger, who is also crucified on a cross, and released from the tomb; all in order to continue that love, that life, that way – and to be himself that cue from God.

All we have to do is respond, with our whole being:

“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

***HYMN** “The Baby in a Manger Stall” [Tune 152]

**1. The baby in a manger stall
is God Incarnate for us all,
as God, true God, the only One,
is born on earth as Mary’s Son.**

**2. We cannot keep the Savior there,
for Christ is meant for everywhere,
not just for shepherds’ watchful eyes,
nor for a wise man’s valued prize.**

**3. As God’s own person here on earth,
Christ came to show us human worth,
so Jesus cannot stay a child,
dependent, gentle, meek, and mild.**

(continued...)

~ 7 ~

**4. The Carpenter of Galilee
must leave his shop and home, as he
takes up the mission and the pain
of life and death and life again!**

**5. So gladly let us sing and pray
since Christ is born for us each day,
and Christ is ris'n with God to reign.
Let earth repeat the glad refrain.**

Text by Jane Parker Huber.

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from “*A Declaration of Faith*”)

**Jesus, the long expected Savior,
came into the world as a child,
descended from David,
conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of Mary, a virgin.**

**He announced to his people
the coming of God's kingdom of justice and peace on earth.**

**We affirm that Jesus was born of woman
as is every child,
yet born of God's power
as was no other child.**

**The coming of Jesus was itself
the coming of God's promised rule.**

**Through his birth, life, death, and resurrection,
he brings about the relationship between God and humanity
that God always intended.**

“A Declaration of Faith” is Copyright 1977, 1991, the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); adopted (1977) “as a contemporary statement of faith, a reliable aid for Christian study, liturgy, and inspiration, with the clear understanding that” it is not approved as a part of the *Book of Confessions*.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Coming God...
All: ...bless us by your presence.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Traditional)

**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 debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

Our best we give to you, loving God, for you have given your best to us in the mystery of the incarnation. May our offerings proclaim Jesus in ways that will be received with joy. Send your Word to the world in this season through our caring service. May we share it with one another in ways that help us all to grow. Use what we offer, to enlighten all people to the truth of your coming, and bless all our endeavors as we seek faithfully in Christ's name to do your will. In his name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "Love Has Come" GtG 110

**1. Love has come: a light in the darkness!
Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.
See, all heaven has come to proclaim it;
hear how their song of joy arises:
Love! Love! Born unto you, a Savior!
Love! Love! Glory to God on high.**

(continued...)

**2. Love is born! Come, share in the wonder.
Love is God now asleep in the hay.
See the glow in the eyes of his mother;
what is the name her heart is saying?
Love! Love! Love is the name she whispers.
Love! Love! Jesus, Emmanuel.**

**3. Love has come and never will leave us!
Love is life everlasting and free.
Love is Jesus within and among us.
Love is the peace our hearts are seeking.
Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas.
Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!**

Text by Ken Bible.

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Tune (BRING A TORCH) arr. by Eric T. Myers.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...**Amen.**

POSTLUDE

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