

December 20th Worship
4th Sunday in Advent

Introduction to the Day

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."

Lighting the Advent Candle – A Light of Love

We encourage you to find some form of Advent Wreath in your own home.

Today we light a candle of LOVE

We bask in the extraordinary glow of the LOVE that we find in Jesus Christ.

We wait for the coming Messiah at Christmas

God looks with favor upon the lowly and unlovable. God casts down the mighty and lifts up those who are down. The hungry are filled and the rich are sent away. This is a LOVE for everyone.

This is Extraordinary LOVE

Let us carry this light of LOVE into the world for all to see.

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.

Lesson – Luke 1:46b-55

^{46b}My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
⁴⁷my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸for you, Lord, have looked with favor on
your | lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me
blessed:

⁴⁹you, the Almighty, have done great things for
me and holy is your name.

⁵⁰You have mercy on those who fear you,
from generation to generation.

⁵¹You have shown strength with your arm
and scattered the proud in their conceit,
⁵²casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.

⁵³You have filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴You have come to the aid of your servant Israel,
to remember the promise of mercy,

⁵⁵the promise made to our forbears,
to Abraham and his children forever.

Gospel – Luke 1:26-38

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.”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.

Message

People of God, grace to you and peace from God, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN.

We have reached the candle end of our countdown to Christmas. Week four of Advent. We light the fourth candle, the candle of Love, and if we were in worship in our sanctuary, we would see our Advent Wreath full, with just the Christ Candle remaining to be lit on Christmas.

We are almost there. And I've found myself, in that almost being there, in this fourth week of advent, as we explore extraordinary love - hope, peace, joy, and extra ordinary love – I've found myself thinking about me a lot as we've crept closer to Christmas. And in this last full week before Christmas Eve and Christmas are here, I've been thinking about how all of this will affect me.

How will Christmas Eve be different for me?

What am I going to do to get all the things done that I need to do in order for Christmas Eve to happen?

How will my plans change? (some for the better, some for worse)

How am I going to enjoy it?

Who am I going to miss?

What is going to be different about it for me?

And it's been a whole lot of me language.

I think that's human. I'm probably not the only one, as the person preaching this sermon, I'm probably not the only one thinking about myself or themselves in this time of complete different. And I don't want to sound like I am about to scold us all for thinking this way. But I do believe it is important to acknowledge that we've really started to think about ourselves a lot, especially these last nine months.

In fact, how much we think about ourselves has really become a part of our public discourse. We've concerned ourselves with how other people are handling this life. And, how we approach other people and our interactions with them have taken over.

The common thread has been how all of these things, other people's actions, our own actions, affect ourselves. Again, I think that's normal and I'm not here to scold us all...and maybe that's because I don't want to scold myself. But, I am relatively confident in saying we have done a whole lot of thinking about ourselves lately and maybe, just maybe, all of those feelings are going to be heightened as we approach a season and a time where everything that is different is going to be amplified.

Not being able to gather with family is going to amplify those feelings. Gathering with family when the feeling may be that people think you shouldn't be doing it is going to amplify those feelings.

And we wonder, like we always do, what do we do with those feelings?

What do we do with those thoughts?

What do we do with those wonderings

and those feelings

and those concerns

and the, "I don't want to scold you" mentality?

Because you could argue, we're just going easy on ourselves, and being real with ourselves isn't something we're always so good at.

BUT, per the usual, we are given a bit of a groundwork for how this *ought* to be.

As we talk about plans changing and things not being the way we anticipated them being we are confronted with this Gospel text where the angel comes to Mary and says, "Oh, by the way, you are carrying the son of God."

That is probably not in her plans for her eight grade year. As a teenager, this conversation is probably not one Mary envisioned having. But, for whatever reason, the angel comes to Mary and says, "you are the chosen one." This young woman, this young girl, chosen to be the first to carry with her, in her, the Good News – literally – of Jesus Christ.

She maybe had a moment of thinking what this means for her, right? I mean, it does say that she was perplexed and that She pondered these things. It does say that she asked, "how can this be? I'm a Virgin." You could argue there are moments of, "Oh, I'm not so sure about this," maybe...

But those moments didn't last very long.

The Angel does say to her, "listen, the Holy Spirit will come upon you. The power of the most high will overshadow shadow. Therefore the child to be born will be Holy." I suppose that would be comforting...or terrifying. "This baby that you didn't plan to have, that the Holy spirit has put inside of you, will be called the Son of God. And now your relative Elizabeth, who's really, old has also conceived a son. And, she's in month six. By the way, nothing is impossible with God." Certainly it could be argued that words of encouragement were offered, but most would still be terrified.

Mary shows us what it should be to live in this extraordinary love. She shows us what it means to be a person of faith - to be someone who carries with them the promise of the good news that is Jesus Christ.

Mary shows us how it is that we are to go about carrying with us that message. She shows us that place that we want to be, and know we can get back to. That, even though everything is different, we still have the power to carry with us the promise of the good news of Jesus Christ.

She shows us what it means to carry with us the promise of that extra ordinary love that comes with carrying that promise when she responds, "here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me, according to your word."

Does that change the fact that I've thought a whole lot about me and how I will navigate this holiday season for myself and my family? No.

Does it bring me back to the promise that is at the heart of all of it? It's starting to.

Just last Sunday, as we were waiting for drive-thru communion to start, Jackson and Olivia were with me and as they saw setting up the communion elements, they asked if they could take communion. Here at Good Shepherd if a child asks to receive God's grace through the sacrament of Holy Communion, we don't tell them, as a church, "you need to fully understand and grasp what this is for you before this happens." We say, "absolutely, God loves you. Here is the body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

So we stood there in the narthex watching the TV and as we heard those words, we shared that meal.

It recentered us.

It reminded us of, it brought us back to, this promise that we gather around.

And this promise that we gather around is the good news of God's love for God's people. It is the good news of God's love for God's people that Mary was carrying inside of her when she said, "here am I the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word."

It is this promise that we come back to. It is this promise that we gather around no matter where and how it is that we gather. In this promise is an extra ordinary love. It's an extra ordinary love that we receive through the Sacrament of Holy Communion, that as we gather we receive this gift of God's grace that was first carried in the womb of a young girl who said,

"here am I, a servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word."

People of God, the word that we are given this day is love.

We are challenged in the midst of this time of different to explore how it is that we show that love and share that love and be that love and know that love and how it is that we live according to that word.

It's okay to think how this is all going to affect you. It's okay to ask those me and I and myself questions, because they are real.

But...

Let yourself get to a place of that love. Maybe it's needing to remind yourself that you are loved and that promise that Mary carried inside of her was a love for you wherever you're at and whatever the questions are that you have, that is the extra ordinary love of this season.

That is the extraordinary love and the hope and the promise of this message and what is to come to and for us at Christmas.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Nicene Creed

Prayers

God of power and might, fulfill your promise and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

Gracious God, all generations call you blessed. In this holy season we pray for our neighbors of other denominations and faiths (*Nearby churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues may be named*). 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*). 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 Katharina von Bora Luther and other 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.

Offering and Offertory Prayer

Our 4th Quarter Well Offering / Mission Offering:

Northwest Synod of Wisconsin and Lutheran Disaster Response.

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.

At Home Communion Liturgy

+WORDS OF INSTITUTION+

(Holding the bread) 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."

(Holding the cup) 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 all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of me." When we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

(Tear the bread, share with each person – invite them to dip into the cup of wine/grace juice) +

LORD'S PRAYER +

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 EACH OTHER +

(Using your pointer finger, dip it in the bowl of water, and make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or the back of their hand)

“Child of God, marked as God's own, Jesus loves you, and will love you forever. AMEN”

Take turns until each person has been blessed.

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.

ANNOUNCEMENTS! ANNOUNCEMENTS! ANNOUNCEMENTS!

Advent at Good Shepherd

Good Shepherd Extra Ordinary Community Secret Santa gift exchange

Purchase a gift and bring it to church by the end of Wednesday. When you drop your gift off, take the gift that is there. Along with your gift write a note to the recipient of your gift to brighten their holiday season. If bringing a gift is difficult for you, come and get a gift anyways, we will have extras.

Good Shepherd Christmas Boxes

Christmas Food Boxes will be happening this year, but it will look different. Instead of asking for food donations to be put into boxes and then delivered, we are asking for monetary donations to purchase boxes/gift cards. Those donations can be sent to the church office by Monday.

Christmas Eve Silent Night Luminaries

Unable to safely gather for the Christmas Eve worship this year, we will be looking at Extra Ordinary Traditions to come alive. One of those is the singing of Silent Night by candlelight. Instead of a sanctuary full of people and candles, we are asking you to decorate a Luminary to be in the sanctuary for our Christmas Eve worship. Please return bags by the end of the work day on Tuesday.