

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT
DECEMBER 20, 2020

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel* Setting: Robert J. Powell

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #357 *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

- 1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear. *Refrain*

Refrain

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

- 2 O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
Who ord'rest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go. *Refrain*
- 3 O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the Law
In cloud and majesty and awe. *Refrain*
- 4 O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's tree,
Free them from Satan's tyranny
That trust Thy mighty pow'r to save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave. *Refrain*
- 5 O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery. *Refrain*
- 6 O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight. *Refrain*
- 7 O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace. *Refrain*

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid:

cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You, and worthily magnify Your Holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sin, be our advocate in heaven and bring us to eternal life. Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

(Silence is kept)

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,

we confess that we have sinned against You and against our neighbor in thought, word and deed; through negligence, through weakness and through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve You in newness of life, to the glory of Your Name. Amen.

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

KYRIE

Kyrie, Kyrie eleison. Kyrie, Kyrie eleison.

For peace in our hearts as we gather for worship, and for the peace of the whole world and the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord

Kyrie, Kyrie eleison. Kyrie, Kyrie eleison.

For the proclamation of the Gospel in this and every place, and for the calling of all to faith, let us pray to the Lord.

Kyrie, Kyrie eleison. Kyrie, Kyrie eleison.

For grace to await our Lord's coming again in glory, and for the joyful anticipation of his coming into our hearts today, let us pray to the Lord

Kyrie, Kyrie eleison. Kyrie, Kyrie eleison.

HYMN OF PRAISE (omitted during this penitential season)

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Stir up Your power, O Lord,

and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



FIRST LESSON 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16

Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you.”

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? 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 for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’ 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, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And 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. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 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. . . .

And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 89:1-5

I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.
For I said, “Steadfast love will be built up forever;
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.”
You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:
‘I will establish your offspring forever,
and build your throne for all generations.’”

Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON Romans 16:25–27

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the

command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

GOSPEL VERSE # 338 St. 1 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

**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 ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart.**

GOSPEL Luke 1:26–38

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 1st chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name 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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

In most of the great renaissance paintings of Gabriel's annunciation to Mary, the blessed virgin is pictured as a great European Lady, almost more splendid than the Archangel of God. But what Luke writes is very different: it is the utterly amazing story that God has chosen to take up residence on earth through the obedience of an ordinary young girl. She was highly favored, not because she was any more splendid than the Patriarchs, like Noah, who served God at the time of the flood, or Abraham, Who God chose to be a blessing to all the nations. She is highly favored because God chose her and entrusted to her womb and her care, His only Son. To all of that Mary answered with the Amen of faith, not understanding God's design, but offering herself in obedience to Him.

But what a story this adds to add to the history of our salvation. In Luke's account Mary asked Gabriel **"how this can be,"** for sons are born to mothers and fathers through their natural sexual union and Mary was not yet even married. Perhaps more interesting, since it was always the male that God set aside, it is huge that Joseph is not part of this part of the story. Mary's priestly relative, Elizabeth is mentioned, but not Joseph. Because Luke is powerfully proclaiming here that It is the Holy Spirit of God Who works this miracle in Mary's body, and the child she will bear will therefore be called **"the Son of God."**

Across the centuries, much has been made of this virgin birth of the Son. So much has been made of it that we might miss how often God enacted miracles that brought other special sons into the world. In this very chapter 2 ancient saints, both long past child bearing years, are suddenly told that they too will have a Son, a Son and a birth so special that the same Archangel of God announces it. Elizabeth had lived her whole life never being able to conceive a child, and certainly also had been the object of scorn because of her barrenness. It was the same for Sarah, so many centuries before. But when God acts, when it is His time, **"all things are possible for God."** In all these other examples the birth came to one who had never been able to conceive. Mary's conception comes before any human sexual contact, so that it is powerfully said, that this is all God's doing, the Holy Spirit Himself breathing life into her womb. The long wait for God to fill the promise of Messiah full to overflowing had come. And it came in this way because God chose it.

Mary's Mom and Dad are also never mentioned in this story. This teen ager was all alone when an angel who ministered directly before God in His throne room, came to visit her. When David received word in our 1st lesson, that he had **not** been chosen to build a house for Yahweh, David was already a seasoned king, a successful warrior, and this message about God's house did not come from the angel Who ministered before the throne; it came from the mouth of a man well known to David, the prophet Nathan. Read in conjunction with our Gospel, this lesson underscores that men do not make up the steps of God's plan, they obey them. Parallel to Mary's experience was the troubling vision experienced by the aged priest Zechariah, who was serving his assigned duties in the temple of God in Jerusalem. He too was visited by Gabriel to announce the birth of a son. But where Mary struggled to understand becoming pregnant without a husband, Zechariah virtually rejected the announcement because his Elizabeth was barren, and both of them were too old. He dared to ask for a proof from Gabriel, an act of defiance that left him unable to speak again until the child was born. Mary was all alone, nowhere near the place where God promised to dwell (the temple), and without those years of experience as a living saint of God, and yet Mary answered better than all of them, **"I am the handmaid of the Lord."**

I've never been visited by an angel, at least not like this. The Scriptures do remind us that in some of the least ones we might meet angels without being aware of it. I am not aware of ever having been visited by either an angel or a prophet. But I have often struggled to understand what God is doing in my village, in my life and in this moment. So often my sense of what God ought to do, now, He has clearly chosen not to do. I have struggled to grasp the meaning of His works, the shape of His will. And never have I said anything as profound as, **"I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be as you have said."** I have often been impatient with God, insisting at times that He act thus and so because that makes sense to me. And so have you, so have we all.

Mary stands as a beacon for all ages of disciples who follow after her. Her simple and humble faith and gentle obedience, instructs us still. Not accidentally the Bible will often say of Mary, as she dealt with pregnancy, then birth, and then the life of her most special Son, that **"she kept all these things and pondered them in her heart!"** Mary did not just have great faith on the day of the annunciation;

or again on the day when her labor pains began. Mary kept on growing in faith. She was ever learning more and more how to walk by faith. And early on she learned that for her growth she needed to learn from the words and actions of her much loved Son.

Who is Mary? Other than a young girl from the tiny village of Nazareth, engaged to a man who could trace his lineage to King David? We know nothing else about her. It is as if God was creating out of nothing as He did in the very beginning. Elizabeth adds a layer of richness to our tapestry of salvation when she greeted her young cousin a few days later. Luke tells us that Mary raced to the Judean hill country, to be with the one who would understand miraculous births. And Elizabeth, whose age and priestly connection should have made us think of her as the more important one here, Elizabeth responded to Mary's greeting by saying, **"Blessed are you among women, blessed is the fruit of your womb, and how do I deserve the honor of the mother of my Lord coming to me?"** Gabriel had barely left Mary before this visit takes place, and already the fullness of His announcement is in the room where Mary went, for Jesus was already incarnate in his mother.

We give ourselves so much credit with being able to maneuver through the world, to both interpret what needs to be next and to shape, by ourselves, the next that we will take on. Mary humbles us. For no one in any age, **"understands"** what God is doing. Mary doesn't either. Her Amen of obedient faith walks in a direction based upon God's promise, **"Thy Word is a light to my path."** In these closing moments of Advent 2020, surrounded by the horror of a pandemic that has yet to be tamed, frightened by the signs God told us were posted in the fig tree, Mary's actions from the beginning of the 1st Advent is still the shape of our journey and our days: **God is able! He reigns!** He holds all in the palm of His hands. He holds us, even now.

Advent always begins by turning our eyes to the Son, the Son Who is coming and near, and we pray, **"Stir up Your power and come."** Even as we near our Christmas celebration of His coming as our human brother, we still yearn for Him to fulfill this last promise, and come to take us home. Trusting that He will come in the right moment. Hoping that it will be the next moment.

Until then we walk by faith. Faith in the One about Whom Mary pondered. And we keep on crying out, **"Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Come quickly. Amen."**

HYMN OF THE DAY #356 The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came

- 1 The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
With wings as drifted snow, with eyes as flame:
"All hail to thee, O lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favored lady."
Gloria!
- 2 "For know a blessed mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honor thee;
Thy son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
Most highly favored lady."
Gloria!
- 3 Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said.
"My soul shall laud and magnify God's holy name."
Most highly favored lady,
Gloria!

- 4 Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
“Most highly favored lady.”
Gloria!

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came Setting: Timothy Shaw

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

O Most High, You have favored us in the incarnation of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of Mary. In everything, let it be to us according to Your Word. Give us faith to believe that nothing is impossible with You, and so to pray boldly in childlike confidence. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Most High, You have revealed in Christ Jesus the mystery kept secret for long ages, now made known to all nations through the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. According to Your eternal command, bless the church as it proclaims your word and gives witness to your grace. And be with all who lead us in these tasks, including Matthew, our Synod president; John, our district president; Andrew, our circuit visitor; and all pastors and teachers in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Most High, hear our prayers on behalf of our nation, its president, all legislators and judges, and those newly elected to serve. Preserve their lives and guide their actions for the good of our people. Give peace among the nations of the earth, and preserve us from pestilence and famine, war and bloodshed, sedition, rebellion and every evil. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Most High, bless all of us in our family relationships. Strengthen all marriages, preserve the bonds of love between parents and children, and especially on this day grant joy to all women with child and all mothers with infants. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Most High, look with compassion on the lonely, the depressed and the despairing. Grant healing to the sick and give peace to the anxious and the dying. Comfort all who mourn. And give to us all the renewed assurance that comes with the certain hope of the resurrection. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Most High, grant that all who receive Your Son's holy body and precious blood may do so in repentance and faith and in the unity of a true confession. And sustain all in faith who cannot receive at this time. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Most High, we give You thanks for Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Key of David and the scepter of the house of Israel. By His death, He has opened the kingdom of heaven and closed the gates of hell for all who trust in Him. By His resurrection, He has rescued the prisoners who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. Grant that as we recall with thanksgiving His advent in the flesh, we may always confess Him and remain watchful for His advent in glory at the Last Day; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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 Lord bless us and keep us.
The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #341 Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates

- 1 Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!
Behold, the King of glory waits.
The King of kings is drawing near;
The Savior of the world is here.
Life and salvation He doth bring;
Therefore rejoice and gladly sing.
To God the Father raise
Your joyful songs of praise.**

- 2 A righteous Helper comes to thee;
His chariot is humility,
His kingly crown is holiness,
His scepter, pity in distress.
The end of all our woe He brings;
Therefore the earth is glad and sings.
To Christ the Savior raise
Your grateful hymns of praise.**

- 3** How blest the land, the city blest,
Where Christ the ruler is confessed!
O peaceful hearts and happy homes
To whom this King in triumph comes!
The cloudless sun of joy is He
Who comes to set His people free.
To God the Spirit raise
Your happy shouts of praise.
- 4** Fling wide the portals of your heart;
Make it a temple set apart
From earthly use for heav'n's employ,
Adorned with prayer and love and joy.
So shall your Sov'reign enter in
And new and nobler life begin.
To God alone be praise
For word and deed and grace!
- 5** Redeemer, come and open wide
My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!
O enter with Thy grace divine;
Thy face of mercy on me shine.
Thy Holy Spirit guide us on
Until our glorious goal is won.
Eternal praise and fame
We offer to Thy name.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates" Setting: Jan Bender

Altar Flowers: by Ian and Kristin C.

Acknowledgments

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