

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 18, 2022

IN THE NAME OF JESUS, WELCOME TO ST. PAUL'S!

A Children's Advent / Christmas Service
A Little Child Shall Lead Them

PRELUDE

Prepare the Royal Highway
Setting: A. Krentz Organ

WELCOME

PROCESSIONAL HYMN #343 (Stand)

Prepare the Royal Highway

1 Prepare the royal highway;
The King of kings is near!
Let ev'ry hill and valley
A level road appear!
Then greet the King of Glory
Foretold in sacred story: *Refrain*

Refrain

Hosanna to the Lord,
For He fulfills God's Word!

2 God's people, see Him coming:
Your own eternal king!
Palm branches strew before Him!
Spread garments! Shout and
sing!
God's promise will not fail you!
No more shall doubt assail you!
Refrain

3 Then fling the gates wide open
To greet your promised king!
Your king, yet ev'ry nation
Its tribute too should bring.
All lands, bow down before Him!
All nations, now adore Him! *Refrain*

4 His is no earthly kingdom;
It comes from heav'n above.
His rule is peace and freedom
And justice, truth, and love.
So let your praise be sounding
For kindness so abounding: *Refrain*

INVOCATION

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

Amen.

BAPTISMAL DESCRIPTION

PRESENTATION FOR BAPTISM

QUESTION TO PARENTS AND SPONSORS

PROFESSION OF FAITH (The Pastor addresses the baptismal group and the congregation)

Do you renounce all the forces of evil, the devil and all his empty promises?

I do.

Do you believe in God the Father?

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

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

I believe 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.

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

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.

☩ THE BAPTISM ☩

Paige Joanna Hecht

(Daughter of William Herbert and Tanya Marie Hecht)

WELCOME BY THE CONGREGATION

We welcome you into the Lord's family. We receive you as a fellow member of the body of Christ, a child of the same heavenly Father, and worker with us in the kingdom of God.

OPENING SENTENCES *(Stand)*

P: Rejoice in the Lord always;

C: again I will say, Rejoice!

P: The wolf shall dwell with the lamb

C: and a little child shall lead them.

P: For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord

C: as the water covers the sea.

P: Blessed be His glorious name forever;

C: may the whole earth be filled with His glory!

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

P: Isaiah wrote that the coming of the Messiah would mean change as great as having “waters break forth in the wilderness.”

C: Help us value the Word of God and the water of our Baptism.

P: When nothing appears to change, and our Lord’s return seems too far in the distant future, James urges: “Be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

C: Help us grow in patience.

P: When our Lord returns, Isaiah promises: “He will come and save you.”

C: Forgive us, Lord, for our sins of thought, word, and deed.

P: Long ago, Christ Jesus came into our world and paid for all sins. Today, he comes through Word and Sacrament to proclaim God's forgiveness to you and assure you of your salvation. When he returns, he will lead you to a New Eden. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, I joyfully announce the forgiveness of God to you in the name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

(Be seated)

A Shoot Will Sprout from Jesse's Stem

N. Through Isaiah, God promises the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, King of Kings—a king even greater than David, who would lead and rule His people wisely and mercifully.

P: As believers in Christ, we already enjoy the benefits of His wise rule, having received His Spirit, wisdom, peace and blessings. The Spirit equips us to spread the word of this blessed reign to all nations.

C: Pour out Your Spirit, O Lord, that we may boldly proclaim your goodness.

HYMN Children

What Hope! An Eden Prophesied

*A shoot will sprout from Jesse's stem,
A branch from David's line,
A Prince of Peace in Bethlehem:
The fruit of God's design.*

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might,

The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord and his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness for his belt.

Isaiah 11:1-3, 5

HYMN Congregation

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

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

Rose of Mary, Son of God

N: At just the right time, God put his plan of salvation into action. In the gospel of Luke, we hear about an angel who appeared to a young girl named Mary, who was to be married to a man named Joseph.

P: Mary was probably terrified at the angel's sudden appearance. The angel calmed her fears and told her about the birth of the Savior, the Son of God. Mary would be the tender stem from whom the Rose would spring.

C: This Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air, dispels with glorious splendor the darkness everywhere.

HYMN Children

God Loves Me Dearly

*God loves me dearly, Grants me salvation
God loves me dearly, Loves even me.
Therefore I'll say again; God loves me dearly,
God loves me dearly, Loves even me.*

*He sent forth Jesus, My dear Redeemer
He sent forth Jesus, And set me free.
Therefore I'll say again; God loves me dearly,
God loves me dearly, Loves even me.*

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be?" Mary asked the angel.

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."

Luke 1:30-38

**Oh, that birth forever blessed,
 When the virgin full of grace,
 By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
 Bore the Savior of our race,
 And the babe, the world's Redeem---er,
 First revealed His sacred face
 Evermore and evermore.**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. *Luke 2:1-6*

HYMN *Children**Silent Night*

*Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!
 Alles schläft, einsam wacht
 Nur das traute, hochheilige Paar.
 Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
 Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh,
 Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh.*

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them,

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” *Luke 2:7–15*

HOMILY

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen. Dear friends in Christ:

On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, with Christmas just about upon us, the Church directs us to think about Mary, the mother of Jesus. In the three-year cycle of readings on this day, two of them tell aspects of her story from the first chapter of Luke. One of these is the Annunciation. The other is the Visitation to Elizabeth and Mary’s great song, the Magnificat.

But this is the year the Church’s cycle calls us to read primarily from Matthew. And Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth, as we just heard, tells us more about Joseph. Joseph’s name is listed in the genealogy which precedes the birth story, with no proviso as in Luke. And Joseph is the one who receives the messages, as given by the angels.

About Joseph, one thing the text wants us to know right away is that he is a man of good character. Joseph is specifically called a “just man.” And evidence of this follows, for we’re told of his decision not to punish or humiliate his fiancé when she was found to be pregnant with someone else’s child, but to divorce her quietly instead.

Here we see that Joseph’s justness does not simply mean one who loves justice, but also one who exhibits goodness and mercy. Indeed, the Greek word here, *dikaios*, indicates this expanded meaning and can be translated as “righteous” if preferred.

The next thing we should notice is that Joseph had “resolved” to do what he was planning to do. The question was decided in his mind, and he was ready to go forward. Except... that he was still also considering the matter. The angel came to him, “as he considered these things.”

Joseph may have made his decision, but he kept thinking about it. And who could blame him? This was a life-changing situation for Joseph and a huge loss as well. Joseph was losing his soon-to-be wife and potential future mother of his children.

We don't get the sense that Joseph's considerations were about alternate courses of action. After all, he had resolved what to do. Rather, he was probably ruminating on all that had happened. Perhaps he was questioning himself. Could he have done things differently in his relationship with Mary? Were there ways in which he was inadequate or undesirable? I'm guessing his head was spinning.

At the same time, perhaps Joseph also considered that there were lessons to be learned. A good and just man will look for these, knowing that life teaches us things if we will only stop and think a bit.

Interestingly, Joseph's considerations here remind us of Mary, who after the birth of Jesus "pondered all these things in her heart." I'm wondering if this character trait that the two shared might have been a source of attraction and connection between them.

I'm also thinking that Joseph's considerations here were very much like prayer. As a righteous man, Joseph no doubt consulted the Lord on his decisions. The text says he was thinking – and thinking that includes a consideration of God's will and purposes is not that much different than prayer. It may even be a form of it.

"As Joseph considered these things," the angel appeared to him. And this is a lesson for us as well. As we consider things in prayer, God will come to us.

Later in Matthew's Gospel, on two different occasions (9:4, 12:25), we hear about Jesus knowing the considerations of others. In both cases people were being critical of him and talking behind his back. Since Jesus knew their thoughts and that these thoughts were being shared, he called them out.

And this reminds us that Jesus knows our thoughts as well. Which can be embarrassing. But should also be comforting. We should find comfort in knowing that Jesus is very aware of our considerations and will act on those which are brought to him in prayer.

Notice, too, that Joseph's considerations were apparently taking place even during his sleep. Joseph may have been sleeping, but his mind was still working on those things he needed to consider. And we understand this, for we take our thoughts to bed with us too.

Sometimes our dreams can shed light on our thoughts. Mostly, however, they just reflect what's on our mind.

Joseph's dream, however, shed great light. Here the Lord spoke to him directly, through an angel. "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is

conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” The dream was not just dealing with Joseph’s fears but giving him a very important message.

Joseph’s dream came while he was sleeping. But as we know, some dreams come also in that space between awake and asleep. People daydream. They got lost in their thoughts. They wonder, marvel and begin to imagine.

This reminds me of something else about our considerations. Fully conscious thoughts, it seems to me, tend to be more conservative. I find that they’re usually rather safe, and mostly uncreative.

We need to have dreams to help move us along. Daydreams, night dreams... any kind of vision of great things and not just good. We need dreamers... like the namesake of the Joseph we’re considering today. Remember him? This Joseph was the son of Jacob – the one who received a

colorful coat and had eleven jealous brothers. This Joseph had big dreams that changed lives. Joseph’s dreams even saved lives and reflected God’s glory.

What about you? What are your dreams like? Do you have dreams for your future? Your family? Your church? Your community?

And are these Godly dreams? Do they take into consideration the ways and wisdom of God? Or are they just dreams of personal grandeur and excitement?

For Joseph, facing a difficult situation and a sad outlook, an angel broke into his dreams and gave him a life-changing message. And things are not that different with us. For us, the Word of God is that “messenger” which breaks into our considerations and provides the changes we need.

The word used by the scriptures to describe Joseph’s act of considering appears also in the Book of Hebrews. There it is found in the context of explaining the power of God’s Word. Chapter four verse twelve says: “The word of God is living and active, sharper than a sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

The thoughts of our hearts aren’t always so good. We are mostly inclined to self-interest, and we quickly and easily find ways to justify behavior that feeds our desires, often at the expense of others. Such behavior is sinful – leading to the fracturing of relationships, including our relationship with God.

The Word of God sheds light on our thoughts and intentions. It is like a sword that helps divide good from bad, right from wrong, helpful from unhelpful. We need that word to inform our thinking.

And we need it, too, because even when our thinking isn't completely self-centered it can still be short-sighted. We need a morality that is more than just "live and let live." We need a doctrine that is more than just "God's out there somewhere."

The Word of God is to guide our thoughts, correct them, lead them, and inform them. When we consider God's will, as Joseph did, that's when God breaks in and leads us – through an angel in a dream, or advice from a friend, or simply in our own God-inspired thoughts.

Think too, how when the angel spoke to Joseph, Joseph could lean on God's word for affirmation of what he had just heard. After all, hadn't God given a child to Abraham, despite his and Sarah's very old age? Hadn't Rachel and Hannah conceived only after years of frustrated waiting? Hadn't Isaiah the prophet said that a virgin would conceive? If these things could happen, why couldn't Mary conceive by the Holy Spirit? God's Word helps us see possibilities and helps us live with hope.

As Joseph considered his situation, he knew to do so in light of God's Word. And in return, God gave him clear help and direction... and much more too. He gave Joseph the best message that could ever be given.

Here we should note Joseph's response to all this. The reading says: "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him."

Joseph's response was one of obedience. He took his wife, had no relations with her until she had given birth, and called his son Jesus – just as the angel had told him to do.

Again, this should lead us to think about our responses. When God speaks to us, what do we do? Do we obey his commands? Do we follow his ways? Or do we listen to the crowds, our friends, or simply the voices that we want to hear – and by those, I mean mostly our own.

God calls us, like Joseph, to care for our families – both our biological family and our church family. God also calls us to be just, to be righteous, to be merciful, and to be faithful.

Reading on in Matthew, we see that an angel of the Lord would speak three more times to Joseph – first telling him to go to Egypt, then telling him to return to Israel, and finally

telling him to go to Nazareth. Each time Joseph obeyed. And each time that decision proved to be a good one.

After that, we hear about Joseph only one more time. At age twelve, Jesus was left behind in the Temple, and we're told that his father and mother were worried and went back for him. But even in that telling, Joseph's name isn't mentioned. He's just the father.

One gets the idea that Joseph was a bit like John, who said of Jesus: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:3). Joseph knew that his son was the one who would save the world, not him.

Still, Joseph is remembered because of his good character and good faith. He was thoughtful, just and obedient – all things which we should aspire to also.

Most of all, Joseph knew to listen to the voice of God. From that word he heard that Jesus came from the Holy Spirit. And he believed it. From that word he also knew that Jesus would save his people from their sins.

Joseph recognized God's voice and followed it. And blessed are we, also, when we do the same. God speaks words of comfort and direction. God will lead us and guide us through our times of pain and confusion. God will forgive our sins for Jesus' sake.

These are the messages we need to hear. And thankfully, God delivers them loudly and clearly.

May God bless our hearing and living of them – today and always. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH (*Kneel*)

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For faith and humility to receive the virgin-born Son of God into our hearts through the means where He has promised to be found: His Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the apostolic Gospel and its ministers, that the name and resurrection of Jesus would be proclaimed among us and among all nations to bring about the obedience of faith in every place, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all husbands and wives, that they would live in love and faithfulness, confidently trusting in God's care; for all couples engaged to be married, that they may come to their wedding day with joy, knowing that Immanuel is the one who saves His people from their sins; and for all children, that they would live in the grace of their Baptism and grow in faith, love and wisdom, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For our nation and its rulers, that the Lord would bear patiently with this land, renew the church in its midst – clearing away all empty shows of piety, and that He would renew genuine faith in the virgin's Son, that His return may not be a sign against us, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For penitent hearts, that God would preserve us from temptation, lead us in His ways, move us to confess our sins, and cause us to rejoice in Jesus, our salvation, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the sick and those in any need, especially Trey, Geraine, Ann, Sophia, Dolly, Gloria, Norma, Brooks, Trudy, Mary Ann, June, Peter, Wendy, Ron, Tawni, Reaghann, and those we name before you in our hearts... let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all who give offerings today, that they may know the joy of rendering unto the Lord; and for all who receive the Lord Jesus in His Holy Supper, that they would be strengthened in faith, renewed in their confession, and assured of their forgiveness, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we give You thanks for Your Son, Jesus Christ, who is truly Lord and ruler of the house of Israel, and who rules with power, mercy and grace. 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; for You live and reign, ever one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

C: 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.

(Be seated)

What Hope! An Eden Prophesied

N: When things are going wrong, we encourage our friends by saying, “Look up. Things will get better.” But that takes hope based on some report or promise. Our Advent hope is based on promises God has made throughout history, some of which we still await. Isaiah sees lions and lambs living together one day and all nations coming to Christ in peace.

P: John the Baptist reminds us that only repentance will enable us to move forward. Advent is a time to recognize God’s grace in forgiving our sins and to look forward—and up—in hope! Today, the children sing well-known hymns, sometimes in other languages, as a reminder that Christ has died for all.

C: For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God that brings salvation to all who believe.

Romans 1:16

HYMN Children

Jesus Loves Me

Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong;
They are weak, but He is strong.

Refrain

Sí, Cristo me ama;
sí, Cristo me ama;
sí, Cristo me ama;
la Biblia dice así.

**Jesus loves me! He who died
Heaven’s gates to open wide.
He has washed away my sin,
Lets His little child come in. *(Spanish Refrain)***

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exalt in my God, for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation. *(Isaiah 61:10)*

*What hope! An Eden prophesied
Where tame live with the wild;
The lamb and lion side by side,
Led by a little child!*

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;

And a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together and the Lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9

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

N: On the first Christmas, Jesus laid aside his majesty so that we could look him in the eye, walk and talk with him, and throw our arms around him in thankfulness.

P: What love God has shown us, to come down to our world and suffer in our place as the servant of all. We glow because God has given us his riches at Christ's expense!

C: Having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:7

P: As we prepare to go forward in God's hope, receive the benediction he gives to his people: The Lord bless and keep You in the hope and peace of His Son. May the blessing of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you every day as you receive His gifts and promises.

C: Amen

P: We end our service with a carol that traditionally begins many Christmas Eve services across the nation: "O Come All Ye Faithful." The children will sing the refrain in Spanish, German, and French, to remind us that Christ's salvation is hope for all. Let's stand and sing it together, sounding the invitation to come and worship our Savior.

SENDING HYMN

(Stand)

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Congregation **O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him
Born the king of angels:**

Children

*Venid, adoremos,
venid, adoremos,
venid, adoremos
a Cristo el Señor.*

**Highest, most holy,
Light of Light eternal,
Born of a virgin, a mortal He comes;
Son of the Father
Now in flesh appearing!**

*Kommt, lasset uns anbeten,
kommt, lasset uns anbeten,
kommt, lasset uns anbeten,
den König, den Herrn.*

**Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God
In the highest:**

*En lui viens reconnaître,
En lui viens reconnaître,
En lui viens reconnaître
ton Dieu, ton Sauveur.*

POSTLUDE

In Thee Is Gladness

Setting: M. Knickelbein

ALTAR FLOWERS: *“O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel,
who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush
and gave him the law on Sinai:
Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm”*

By Jennifer Zambone

FELLOWSHIP: Board of Fellowship

Those serving:

Sunday, December 18,

8:00 a.m.

Greeter: Steve Janssen

Comm. assist: Dede Dixon

Reader: Rich Kauzlarich

10:30 a.m.

Greeter: Janice Sebring

Acolyte: William Dennis

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