



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Fourth Sunday of Advent December 20, 2020 Tree of Life

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."

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

GATHERING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

We praise you, O God, for this wheel of time
that marks our days of preparation for Christ's advent.
As we light the candles on this wreath,
open our eyes to see your loving presence
with and through us as your children.
Enlighten us with your grace,
that we may sing of your peace and joy among us
in the Word made flesh.
We pray this through Christ our Lord,
in whom we have the sure and certain hope of salvation.
Amen.

Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah (ELW #240)

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

And on this final Sunday of this season of Advent, we give thanks for not just the gift of God's Son Jesus, but also for the water that reminds us of the grace and mercy shown to us through this Son in baptism. This water that gives life connects us all together, from every corner of the earth, joined as one beloved human race. This water that cleanses and clears shows us the purity of God's grace, redeeming us into salvation and forgiving us of any and all sin. This water that refreshes our bodies energizes our spirits to be God's hands, feet, and love for all the world.

And so those of you with water in front of you, put your hands in the water. Be reminded. Feel forgiven. Know that you are loved, cherished, and brought to live with God and the saints in God's kingdom as a community and family, together acting as the body of Christ for all time. And as a further reminder, feel free to use the water to make a sign of the cross on your foreheads as we again feel the refreshing purity of God's love, shown to us in this upcoming Christmas season and always, through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

GATHERING HYMN: Beneath the Tree Of Life (TOL p. 3)

GREETING

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

And also with you.

KYRIE (TOL p. 4)

HYMN OF PRAISE (TOL p. 6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Mighty God, your faithfulness is magnified in the coming of your Son, in the long awaited birth of your promised Messiah. May we, like Mary, proclaim your greatness as we rejoice in our Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: 2 Samuel 7:11, 16

A reading from 2 Samuel.

Instead of David building a house (temple) for God, God promises to establish David's house (dynasty) forever. Centuries later, after the Babylonian exile, no king sat on the throne. Even then, however, the people of Israel remembered this promise and continued to hope for a king, the messiah, God's anointed.

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

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

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Luke 1:46b-55

^{46b}My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

⁴⁷my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸**for 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.

⁵⁰**You 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,

⁵² **casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.**

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

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

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

SECOND READING: Romans 16:25-27

A reading from Romans.

Paul closes his letter to the Romans by praising God because, in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God has revealed the promised, divine plan of salvation for all humanity. Paul proclaims this gospel of Christ in order to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations.

²⁵ Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (TOL p. 10)

GOSPEL: Luke 1:26-38

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

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.

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, favoured 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 favour 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.

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Good and gracious God, send your Spirit upon us as we await the coming of Jesus our Lord. Fill us with good things, that might be able to recognise and reflect your love in and around our communities and lives, through Christ, the Word become flesh. Amen.

So it's crunch time. We are just under a week before Christmas, and things are getting buuuusy. I know, some of you are thinking, aren't you getting Christmas off this year because of the pandemic? Well, technically yes, this won't be a usual Christmas where I'm here early in the morning for a worship service, and I will be taking the Sunday immediately after Christmas off as well. But as it is in all the other years before this one, and I'm sure it is for most of you, Christmas Day itself isn't the busy time... it's the days leading to it that are.

As many of you know so well, there is a lot of preparing that needs to be done. A lot of planning, a lot of lists to check off, a lot of things that need to get into place. Sure, this year because of the pandemic there aren't too many parties, school pageants, or fighting for a parking spaces at the malls, but this pandemic year there has been a lot more mouse scrolling and clicking, a lot of grocery shopping at the most inconvenient times in hopes to avoid the crowds, and a lot going to the door to bring packages inside before someone runs off with them. And yes, we have fewer services this year and more of a loose schedule as to when we can "attend" the services, but that just means there is a lot more thinking and worrying about how to make this Christmas special in spite of all the changes that had to take place this year.

Now, I'm not complaining at all, I'm just stating the fact of the time constraints that I and many of you are facing. I still enjoy my work and being able to be part of your lives in this way, but it's just some days, you know what I mean? Oh... those days. Those extra special, extra busy, extra stressful days. You all probably know what I'm talking about. Just those days when things don't go your way, those things that happen that were unplanned and completely catch you off guard, those times when you just want to curl up in a dark corner and think if you sit there long and quietly enough, then maybe this day would just leave you alone. Those days when you just have to sigh, "why me".

We've all had those days. We all have those days. And if logic serves me right, we probably will have many more of those days, pandemic Christmas or not. It is just the way life goes.

And so when I look at Mary, the mother of Jesus, and this story of how the angel Gabriel appears to her and drops this news, I imagine that she would be having one of those days as well. I know, we all like to romanticize the story, pretty it all up, take away the realism of the story, making Mary is this 20-something, white, middle class woman receiving the best news of her life that she will be carrying the son of God in her womb. We like to clean up the smells, the dirt, the controversy. Because if you think about it, Mary was actually an under-aged, coloured, poverty-stricken girl that just found out that she is unwantedly and illegitimately pregnant, just shortly before she is due to be married. That is the kind of news that could end someone's life. That is the kind of news that have ended people's lives. And so at this point in Mary's mind, she probably was thinking that her life is ending. Why would her case be different?

Well, except for the fact that an angel told her the news. I mean that's pretty different than a blue line on a stick.

Anyway, I would imagine that Mary's first reaction to be like how any woman hearing such life-changing news would react: full of fear, trepidation, and anxiety. Maybe she was asking what she could do now. How can she support this child? How would they ever survive? Surely her betrothed wouldn't want her anymore, she'd be considered as damaged goods. She won't be able to find a job as a single mother. She would have no place to live, no place to raise this child, no place to even be. I mean she's not just having one of those days, she's having probably the worst day of her very short life so far.

But her reaction isn't that. Well, maybe a little at first, but it doesn't stay that way. Not by a long shot. This young, innocent girl, probably just hitting her teen years, didn't cringe with fear, she didn't cower in a corner, she didn't even throw her hands in the air and scream out "why me". She starts with a little confusion, perhaps a little bit of denial, but once it sunk in she, sort of like a high school musical, breaks out in a song. And not just any song. A really, really happy song.

She joyously praises God for this gift that she's been given. She recognises God being with her through this very likely scary time and accepts her situation. She realises that even though her life has changed forever, she is still dearly and wholly and unconditionally loved by God.

And we might think, how on earth? In the midst of everything, how could she even keep it together? Where did she find the strength? How did she see the good news in her situation? What was she even thanking God for? I mean we've already established how this news probably wasn't good for her. In fact it was probably really bad. So how did she have it in her to sing? To have joy? To even remember that she is loved?

See, it isn't because she is having this strange, life-altering day that she comes to the conclusion that she is loved, rather it's because God had already promised to love her that she is able to handle the day. It isn't her current situation that reminded her of God's promise, but it was God's faithful and just nature that filled her with strength and confidence. It isn't this drastic change in her life that brought her joy, but it is her looking back at her life and seeing and recognising all the ways that God has already shown her love, all the ways that she was able to see God present in her life, all that ways that she felt God's providence and protection that reassured her that God wasn't going to abandon her now in her time of need. Rather God will continue to strengthen her, provide for her, and of course love her throughout any hardship.

So she remembered all this, cherished it, and drew strength from it, and was driven to face this hardship not with unwilling reluctance, but with joy and hope and peace in the Spirit.

And it is the same with us. It is in our knowing that God had already loved us from before we were even born that allows us to face the situations that we might have to face. It is in God's promise of love for us that drives us, motivates us, and gives us strength to do the things we do in spite of whatever problems or unwanted changes or those days we might have.

So yes, this Christmas will be different, but it is ok, because we are still loved. This Christmas will be perhaps difficult, but we are still part of God's wide and inclusive family with our community and all the saints. This Christmas could be one that is unlike any Christmas that

we've known in our lives, but it is still the day on which we remember love coming down to us to be one of us in the midst of great hardship and turmoil, to remind us that even when the world seems to be against us, we are not alone but have God on our side holding us, strengthening us, and filling us with joy, peace, and love.

So in these final days of this Advent season, may we be reminded of God's love in spite of whatever situation we find ourselves in, may we be strengthened to face whatever unwanted or uncomfortable change that might be happening in and around our lives, and may we be driven to sing praises and magnify God's love in response to God's presence and providence freely given to us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came (ELW #265)

APOSTLES' CREED (TOL p. 11)

With all of God's beloved people, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's 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 to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

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

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Called to live in God's love and providence, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "God, in your loving mercy," and you are invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, our souls proclaim your greatness, and our spirit rejoices in your salvation. Your love has been made known to all the generations and has driven us to reflect that love through our service to others. May your love continue to shine through us to all the nations, filling all people with hope and joy in your name. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you look upon us, your servants, with favour and you bless us with your grace and mercy. Strengthen our ministry to others that your inclusive love be felt by all. We pray especially for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and our companion churches of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in

Comox and the pastors and leaders that help there; and for our seminaries both in Saskatoon and Waterloo and all the faculty, staff and students that teach, work, and study there. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you have done great things and holy is your almighty name, for you have created the lands and the seas and you have lovingly placed the stars into the skies. We give you thanks for entrusting this creation to us, and may you continue to give us the strength and wisdom to properly care for it. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, there is strength in your name, as you lift up the lowly and show mercy to the generations. May our world leaders and politicians recognise the wonders of your love, that they be inspired to lead and govern with hints of your grace and mercy, and perhaps one day bring us all to peace. We pray especially for Solyana Amanuel, that her journey into our country be swift. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you come to our aid and promise us mercy, and you fill us with your love and healing. Be with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, and may we always feel your inclusive welcome into your kingdom and community. Especially we pray for Paula; Beulah; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry; Chris; all those who have contracted or been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your promises of grace and mercy on us and our forbears lasts forever. May we rest in this eternal welcome that you show us, that we might remember our connection to you and all the saints that have gone before us. Increase our faith as our trust remains in you. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your loving providence and mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

MEAL

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

OFFERING HYMN: Come, Let Us Bring (TOL p. 13)

OFFERING PRAYER

God of abundance, we give thanks for all that you give, all that you provide, and all that you graciously bestow upon us as your children. May this food before us remind us of your ever-nearing presence in the birth and life of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

DIALOGUE (TOL p. 14)

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty, and our joy, that we should at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O holy and almighty God, through our Saviour Jesus, who is love incarnate come down in our midst, joining us with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the whole church on earth, in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (TOL p. 14)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord, our souls proclaim your greatness and our spirits rejoice in you, for you have looked upon us with favour and you bless us with your saving grace. In your holy and almighty name, you have shown mercy on us and you lift us up, you come to our aid, and you fill us with good thing. And in the fullness of time, you send to us your Son, Jesus, to be with us as one of us, showing us your ways of love and community.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends, thanked you for the bread before them which he broke and shared saying, "take and eat, this is my body given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After they ate, he took the cup, gave thanks, and shared that saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this food given to us that we are reminded of the promise of mercy, as we proclaim this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

O God you are indeed holy, almighty, and great, and we give you thanks for all that you have done, are doing, and continue to do through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (TOL p. 17)

Brought together by the love of God, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those**

**who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste, see, know that God is love.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (TOL p. 17)

POST-COMMUNION HYMN: By Your Hand You Feed Your People (TOL p. 18)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give you thanks for again feeding us with your Word and empowering us with your love, that we might act as your hands and feet in the world in this upcoming Christmas season and always, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God for whom nothing is impossible hold you and keep you,
the God who provides all good things shine on you and be gracious unto you,
this same God who is magnified through the rejoicing proclamation of our souls look upon you
with favour and bless you with peace for the generations to come.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness (ELW #251)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, be unafraid for God is with you.
Thanks be to God.