



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Fourth Sunday of Advent December 19, 2021 Tree of Life

Cradle and cross are inextricably connected on the fourth Sunday of Advent. Between a lovely tribute to the little town of Bethlehem and Mary's magnificent song of praise, the letter to the Hebrews reminds us in no uncertain terms that Christ's advent is for "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." It is the kind of tension in which the church always lives as when in holy communion—with high delight—"we proclaim the Lord's death."

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping in-person and 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.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmi̓nəm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP AND LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

(Paraphrase of Luke 1:46b-55)

We gather together this day to proclaim the greatness of our Lord and to rejoice in God our Saviour. For God looks upon us with favour and blesses us with the great things that God has done throughout the generations. In God's continuous mercy we have been able to see God working in the world, lifting up the lowly and humbling the haughty and comes to the aid of us all.

So to remember these enduring and everlasting promises of God, we bless the wreaths that adorn our space, as they are endless circles of life, so may we be reminded of God's steadfast love that lasts forever.

And we also light the first candle on this particular wreath, representing the hope that we have in these promises. The second candle that we light reminds us of the peace that comes from our faith and trust in God. Then the third candle which we first lit last week is the joy that comes from God's saving grace for us all. Finally, the final Advent candle of this wreath is lit, which reassures us all of the love that God bestows upon all of God's people, welcomed into God's kingdom, invited participants in God's community and family.

So with these candles lit and our space decorated, we look ahead to the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we together worship our God through the fellowship we share in the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

GATHERING HYMN: My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness (#251)

GREETING

The hopeful grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the peaceful love of God, and the joyful fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, by the power of your Spirit you set us free, and by the birth of your Son in our midst we can see your saving grace and unending love. May we enter into the Christmas season full of hope, peace, joy, and love, that our lives might be a reflection of your mercy through Jesus our brother and Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Micah 5:2-5a

A reading from Micah.

The prophet Micah, having pronounced judgment upon Judah, speaks of a future shepherd-king who, like David, will come from the small town of Bethlehem. (Ephrathah refers to the area around Bethlehem.) This king will restore Israel and bring peace. New Testament writers understood this passage to be referring to Jesus.

²But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.

³Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.

⁴And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;

^{5a}and he shall be the one of peace.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 10:5-10

A reading from Hebrews.

The author of Hebrews uses the image of religious sacrifice to convey the significance of Christ's coming. Through obedient acceptance of God's will, Christ allows his own body to become the greatest sacrifice of all, one through which we are made a holy people.

⁵Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;

⁶in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.

⁷Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God'
(in the scroll of the book it is written of me)."

⁸When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), ⁹then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 10)

GOSPEL: Luke 1:39-55

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Elizabeth, John's mother, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, are two women filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. In Elizabeth's inspired greeting and Mary's song of praise we hear of a saving God who remembers, scatters, lifts up, and fulfills all things.

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁴⁶And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Mighty God, you scatter the proud and fill the hungry, by your Spirit let your word leap in us and bring out the joy that comes from your steadfast love and providence, seen in the birth and life and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Three years ago, in 2018 when this text last appeared in our lectionary, I was talked about the hype around the at the time upcoming Marvel movie, Avengers Endgame. The trailer for it had just dropped and people were going bananas. Now, three years later, we have another epic Marvel movie to talk about: Spiderman No Way Home. This movie just came out this last Friday, so being the super nerdy super fan that I am, I watched it on Thursday. Now, I'm not going to get into the nitty gritty of the movie and drop spoilers for you all, but I can say that the movie was indeed epic, and you really should see it if you get the chance.

But what I want to talk about is the hype. And there was a *lot* of hype for this movie. Maybe because it was the first actual Marvel release that people care about since the pandemic

started? Sure there were other movies and titles that came out, like Black Widow and Hot Guy Hawkeye, but like I was saying a couple weeks ago, no one really knows about those other characters. But Spiderman? Everyone knows who Spiderman is, the character has been among Marvel's most popular in the comics for like ever now. And I think this is for good reason, Spiderman is a very well written character, he's funny and has cool and unique powers, but underneath it all, he's just a regular kid.

Much of Spiderman's story is about his secret identity, Peter Parker, who is just a regular kid from Queens who lived with his aunt and uncle because his parents were deceased, when he gets bit by a radioactive spider that gave him his spider powers. Shortly after his uncle dies which drives Peter to be Spiderman, because "with great power comes great responsibility", and Peter has great power and he sees it as his job to use it for good.

But all that comes with its own problems though. Peter is a high school student when all of this happens. He has homework and tests and assignments. Even after graduation he has a meager job taking pictures for a newspaper. He has regular problems like a regular person. He also has super problems like a super hero, but the stories around this character often talk about his personal life, his wants and his needs, his hopes and his dreams, his family and relationships, and how to balance all that regular stuff with also being a friendly neighbourhood super powered individual.

And this is what resonates with so many of the comic readers and now movie goers. Aside from his amazing ability to do whatever a spider can, like spin a web any size to catch thieves just like flies, he is underneath that mask and hype, just a down-to-earth, regular kid. This makes the character much more approachable, more accessible, more relatable to us, as that totally could be us. Well, minus the super powers, that is.

So this character Spiderman relates to today's themes because he reminds me of Mary, the mother of Jesus. I know, first Hawkeye reminds me of John the Baptizer, and now Spiderman reminds me of Mary. What's next? Simon Peter as the Hulk and the Apostle Paul as Iron Man? Anyway, the reason Spiderman reminds me of Mary is specifically because of this passage that we get today for the 4th Sunday of Advent. We all know Mary as the young unwed woman who gave birth to Jesus. We all know how she was brave and wise beyond her years. We all know her as the mother of all mothers. In many minds, she could be a real life superhero with what she has done.

But today, in today's passage, Mary who is newly pregnant, goes and visits her cousin Elizabeth who is not so newly pregnant. And their interaction reminds us that Mary, underneath all of that hype, is just a regular, down-to-earth kid. Someone who is approachable, accessible, and relatable.

Sure, you might think, where on earth did I get all that from just 17 verses? Well it isn't exactly explicit, but very implied in just how they interact and what they say to and about the situation. Elizabeth being elated just to see her young cousin, and Mary breaking out in a song which has been coined "the Magificat" over the years.

And this song that Mary sings really packs a punch. It's one of those things that might be so familiar that we don't often look at it and ponder it, but when we unpack it a bit, we can see where Mary is at in terms of her own cultural context. We can see the hope that she has not

just in her child, but in the changing of the world. We can see her humility in giving all glory to God, and declaring that she *magnifies* God.

And that's something that struck me as I read Mary's song this time around. She opens with her soul *magnifying* God. Obviously that is where we get the Magificat name, but what does it mean to "magnify"?

Well, any kid who has read any detective story would know that to magnify is to make bigger, enlarge something so it is more easily seen, or even to harness and focus power and effectiveness, as is the case with the sun and pyromaniacs. That is what a magnifying glass is for.

So Mary's song is to show how she, her whole self, her very identity is bringing to light who God is. And who is God to Mary? She says that God is merciful from generation to generation, God is strong, God scatters the proud and brings the powerful down from their thrones. And at the same time, God lifts the lowly, fills the hungry with good things, and helps those in need.

See Mary sees herself in that camp, because she knows that she isn't powerful or mighty or with any influence whatsoever. But she sees how even in her seemed small and insignificant self, she is chosen by God not to be powerful, but to be the example of just how God's grace and mercy work.

This isn't to say that the powerful don't have a role in God's work, but it is to say that it isn't just the powerful that have a role. God chooses the powerless as well. God chooses the nobodies, the outsiders, the insignificant. God chooses the regular, down-to-earth people too.

And so, I wonder, where and in whom do we see God magnified? With whom do we most clearly see God at work in the world? Where is God, not hyped up per se, but in the real, tangible trenches of life?

For me, I see God in those who take the time to help others. Those who sacrifice their own comfort and luxuries to offer a helping hand. I saw this most recently in flood relief efforts in the past month. I saw it throughout this pandemic in how people have been trying to be considerate and helpful to others, even though I know everyone is tired of it all. I see it in this community, our church, as many of us offer our time to help others, such as in making sandwiches for those who might not be as fortunate as us.

Wherever you might see God, know that God's love and mercy is magnified even in us. For just as Mary was an example of how God's grace works, so are we examples as imperfect people who are just as loved and forgiven and welcomed as God's own children. See this is why Mary broke out in song in that in her own ordinary self she was chosen. This is why Spiderman is so popular because he's just a regular kid who was given special powers to help others. This is why we worship, to proclaim and magnify God's name, showing the world how we aren't called to be perfect, but we're called to be forgiven. We aren't made to be respected but we are made to be loved. We aren't destined to be powerful, but we are given the power of the Spirit of love and community to see God residing in the hearts of the least likely, and trusting that God believes in and anoints those who we might not ever give a second look.

So as we close off this season of Advent, this season of hope and waiting, may we together ring in the Christmas season, where we can see and recognise Christ enter the world as God with us, and may that truth inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with our God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Love Has Come (#292)

APOSTLES' CREED (p.11)

With all who proclaim God's love, 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 magnify God's love to all people, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "Lord, in your loving mercy," and you all may respond with **hear our prayer.** Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God our Saviour, we proclaim and rejoice in your love. May the gifts of this Advent season of hope, peace, joy, and love be reflected in our lives to all people, that as we together ring in the Christmas season we can faithfully magnify your greatness in all the world. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God our Shepherd, you look upon us with favour and you bless us as your servants. May our ministry in our neighbourhoods and communities be effective and pleasing to you. We pray especially for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop and bishop elect Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and our companion congregations of the BC Synod. In particular we pray for Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Comox and the pastors and leaders that serve there; and our seminaries both in Saskatoon and Waterloo and all their students, faculty, and staff. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God the Creator, your creation is great and it reflects the holiness of your name. strengthen us as faithful stewards of all that you've entrusted to us, that this planet and everything in it might flourish and healed. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God our Counsellor, your strength scatters the proud, humbles the mighty, and confuses the wise. Instill in all world leaders and politicians a trust in your ways of grace and truth, that this world might one day know true peace in your name. We pray especially for those who face danger and political turmoil, and particularly those we've sponsored to come into country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; that all might find security and safety. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God the Spirit, you fill us with good things and you come to our aid when we call. Heal those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love might bring us all back into wholeness with you and each other. We pray especially for Paula; Diana; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Charlotte; William; Owen; Amika; Chris; those who have contracted or been affected by COVID 19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God the Christ, your promise of salvation has endured the generations and will last forever. You welcome all the saints of the past, present, and future to live with you in your kingdom, and you join us together by your grace. May we all draw strength from the faith of the past, that our faith into the future might flourish and inspire in your love. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your loving peace and joyful hope, found in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE (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.

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

It is indeed right, our duty, and our joy, that we should at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who was born to us as one of us, showing us your ways of steadfast love and peace, lifting us up in the hope and joy of your salvation.

For on the night that he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he took some bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it and said, "Take and eat, this is my body given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the common cup, gave thanks, and gave it to all to drink from 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 these gifts of God that we feel the love of God, even as we declare the mystery of faith:
Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

To you, O God, be all honour and glory, through our Lord, your Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 17)

Gathered into one love by the Holy Spirit, 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

Come to the table, for God has given you gifts of love.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 17)

One Bread, One Body (#496)

Ubi caritas et amor (#642)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, you have delivered us from exile, separation, and despair and brought us into communion with you and each other. May this merciful gift of love be received in gratitude by

all people, that it be reflected in our lives and community for the peace of the world through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God of justice be your path,
the Lord of mercy be your guide,
and the Spirit of love be your light,
now and always.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Canticle of the Turning (#723) verses 1, 2, 4

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, trust in the promises of God.

Thanks be to God.

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