



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 24, 2023

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 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 hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather this day to proclaim the greatness of our Lord, to rejoice in God our Saviour. For our Lord has looked with favour upon us all, this day and for the generations to come, reminding us of the holiness in God's name, in God's community, and in God's love. And so we are strengthened and lifted up, filled with good things, and granted God's eternal mercy. We give thanks for this promise given to each of us as children of Abraham, proven through the manifestation of God with us, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

And in our thanksgiving we look to this wreath of life, ready to light the 4th candle representing love. May this circle of light remind us always of the hope we share in God's peace and love, bringing us the joy to praise God's name, to have our faith strengthened, and be led down the paths of righteousness leading us to see the Emmanuel, God with us, human and flesh, Jesus Christ our brother and Saviour. **Amen.**

Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah (#240) vs 1-4

O God of love, come.

Let us walk in the salvation of our Lord. Amen.

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

GREETING

The inspiring grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the strengthening love of God, and the unifying fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

HYMN OF PRAISE (p. 6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Mighty God, your faithfulness is magnified in the coming of your Son, in the long-awaited birth of the 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 7:1-11, 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?”⁸ 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 to be prince over my people Israel;⁹ 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.¹⁰ And 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,¹¹ 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.¹⁶ Your 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.
⁵³You 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,
⁵⁵the promise made to our forebears,
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.

²⁵Now 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 ages²⁶ 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—²⁷to 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 (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.

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The 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. ³⁶And 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. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then 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

Astonishing God, send your Spirit upon us this day as we anticipate your presence among us. Open our eyes that we may conceive the gift of you with us, among us, and as one of us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Travel back in time with me, if you will, to the early 80s, the decade in which I did much of my growing up. There was a relatively unknown band out of Australia that put out a new song that became the anthem for at least the kids in my class. We would sing it all the time, often in taunt against the losing team of whatever sport we were playing, because the song talked about how things just are as they are, we cannot change it. Things will be as they will be, so we might as well accept it. Things just "is what it is" so don't feel so bad that your team sucks and is losing right now.

We would sing the heck out of this song, not just because it was catchy and fun and so easily rolls out of your mouth and it just feels good to sing it, but also as a nice way to tell our opponents that it's ok to lose once in a while, to not always be the best, and to pick yourself up and try again (at the same time still remind them that we're winning).

"Life is Life" was the name of the song, and my goodness did we ever love it. Sha na na na na.

I'm sure you've heard this song before. It's been used in commercials, jingles, and it was even used as the theme song of one of the World Cups. It's a song that really is timeless and for me, a song that pops into my head from time to time when I think of life just being life.

And to be honest, this past week was one of those times. And as this song was percolating in my head, in fact I *couldn't* get it out of my head as I'm sure some of you can't right now either, I decided to look up the song so I could listen to it. I turned to trusty Google to find it on YouTube and guess what I found?

The song isn't called "Life is Life" at all. Instead, it's "*Live* is life". L-I-V-E, not L-I-F-E. I know, right? Who else thought it was Life is Life? Sha no no no no.

Crazy, right? I'm still kind of blown away by it all and I admittedly took a long time to try to figure out if it's "live" (short l) as a verb or "live" (long l) as an adjective. At first I was convinced that it was the verb as it made more grammatical sense although it didn't really sound like it. I just chalked it up to their Australian accents making it sound different. But after more research than I ever imagined, I've come to learn that it's actually the adjective form with the long vowel sound, because the band actually wrote this song to be specifically about their live performances and concerts. "*Live* is Life".

But either case, the new meaning of the song remains roughly the same regardless of how you pronounce it or with whatever accent. And I think this new revelation for me makes the song better, as I said as kids we used to sing this song as a taunt, telling others to lick their wounds and roll with the punches, much like a song called "Life is Life" would do. But now that I know this song is called "*Live* is Life", then it's less of a consoling kind of theme and more of a battle cry to go out there and take life by the horns, give it your all, and live each moment to the fullest and just experience life.

And to me, that is what I feel Mary does in today's reading. Today, the 4th Sunday of Advent is the Sunday of love. It's Sunday of Advent that we hear about Jesus' earthly parents and their encounter with the divine. Today, we get the story of Mary's encounter, when she learns for the first time that she will be with child. Mary, who we are told is very young, likely in the 12- or 13-year-old range. Mary, who we can assume is quite poor just by the nature of where she is from and the era of this story. Mary, who is not yet married but betrothed, has just been told by some mysterious celestial being that she will bear a child in spite of everything else telling her that she shouldn't. Quite a smack to the head, isn't it.

I mean, I'm thankful that I didn't have to go through this as a 12 or 13 year old, and I'm relieved that none of my kids have either (not yet at least as 2 of them aren't that age yet). But I can imagine that this kind of news would be scary, terrifying even, to the point that you'd want to give up and just "nope" on out of there. That angel Gabriel can keep his news.

But Mary doesn't do that. Not for very long anyway. Instead, in just a few short verses she breaks out in the song that we get for our Psalm today, and sings about the glorious wonders of her life and the child in her womb, and the great providence of our God. To Mary, life just isn't life, but *live* is life, as even in the face of the fear, the trouble, the uncertainty of it all, she is able to carry on, sing, and give thanks and praise to God.

Sure, we might think, that's nice for Mary and all. I mean, good for her to figure all that out. She's going to need that resolve and wisdom if she's going to be raising the Messiah. But the part that is missing today between Mary getting the news from the angel and her singing, the part that incidentally we'll get next year on the 4th Sunday of Advent in year C, is about Mary going out and seeking help.

See, Mary gets the news and she heads out to see her cousin, Elizabeth, the mother of John the baptizer. And it was there that Mary receives great encouragement and feels lifted up enough to sing out in joy.

I know, you all might know this story and are bored just hearing me regurgitate it, but I found this really interesting this time around. As the life that Mary is about to lead, the *live* part that she is called to, the love that she is able to carry from the moment that Jesus is born, to her being among the few at the foot of the cross, comes from community.

I mean, not much community in great numbers, as first it's just Elizabeth, then Joseph and some sleepy shepherds, and then all but like one of the disciples desert her, but those few are enough.

"Where two or more are gathered" Jesus says. When there is another with us that can understand who, what, and where we are. Those times when we realise that we are indeed plugged into community... there is love.

There is love that reminds us that we are valued and worthy. There is love that redeems us even in the face of adversity and trouble. There is love that gives us the strength to live the life that truly is life.

This is what I see for this 4th Sunday of Advent. That Mary, the mother of our Lord, could have very easily been filled with a fear that would drive her to give up, she instead is filled with a love that moved her to live. The shame she may have anticipated to have was replaced with the support and care of her husband and family and community. The lowliness and unworthiness that she was raised to feel as being from the wrong side of the tracks, the wrong side of the social ladder, and the wrong side of what was socially acceptable for the time, has been put away to make room for the favour of God that she had all along, the blessing of the community to which she belongs, and the life of joy and love in the Spirit that flows through us all.

This is the progression that we get through this season, from divine hope that leads to gracious peace that brings fulfilling joy, we are brought to love. Love ourselves for who we are created to be as God's people. Love for others who are there with us and help us see the face of the living God. Love for God our Creator, Redeemer, and Saviour, who redeems us and is with us and reminds us of a life worth living.

Wherever we are, whatever we are going through, however we are feeling, know that you are wonderfully made, welcomed into relationship and community, and wholly loved by the God who lifts us up to live life. Sha yes yes yes yes.

So as we finish this season of Advent to move into the season of Christmas, may we wholeheartedly embrace the love of the Christ Child, reminding us of who we are, whose we are, and who is with us always. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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

APOSTLES' CREED (p. 12)

Together with all living in the love of God, 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 accept and reflect the love of God, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "by your loving mercy, O God," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. By your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, our souls proclaim your greatness, and our spirit rejoices in your salvation. 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 and recognised. We lift up in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those that use our building for worship, work, and play; our full communion partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our bishops, rostered ministers, congregations, communities, and ministries of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Coquitlam and their pastor Eric Krushel; and for Trinity Lutheran Church in North Delta and their pastor Jennifer Wilson. By your loving mercy, O God, **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. By your loving mercy, O God, **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 for the areas of the world that face war, violence, and turmoil,

that we all learn to band together and live in harmony. We also pray for the continued support of those that we've sponsored to come to our country: Abraham Barhane; and Solyana Amanuel; as well as for those who have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. By your loving mercy, O God, **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 Beulah; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Bryan and Chona; Sukhwant; Cari; John; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Matt; Lucas; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

By your loving mercy, O God, **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. By your loving mercy, O God, **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.**

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.

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 God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who enters this world and our communities and lives in surprising and unexpected ways, moving us to, with all the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth, praise your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (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 things. 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 and love, as we together proclaim the basis of our 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 the surprising ways that you show up in our lives and communities, lifting us up as your people, and bestowing upon us a steadfast and gracious love, 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 (p. 17)

Declared as God's beloved, 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 and see, God's unyielding love and presence among us.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 17)

That Boy-Child of Mary (#293) vs 1, 2, 3, 6

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give you thanks for yet again feeding and nourishing us with this heavenly food, symbolized here by this bread and cup. May your love for all people be reflected in our lives,

community, and service, that we may be able to more readily recognize your presence here around us, among us, God with us, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God of undying and steadfast love bless you and keep you,
the God who is magnified through our rejoicing shine on you and be gracious onto you,
the God through whom nothing is impossible look upon you with favour, and give you peace.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Canticle of the Turning (#723)

DISMISSAL

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

Thanks be to God.

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