



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 22, 2024

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."

We at Grace Lutheran Church strive to reflect and proclaim the love of God shown to us by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by providing an inclusive and supportive environment through loving care and community service.

A warm welcome to all who are worshipping with us in person or online! We appreciate your contribution to the community today: with your voice, your presence, and just the blessing that you are. May you be nurtured by God's Word, empowered by the love of Christ, and stirred by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in this service this day, for the sake of God's mission in the world.

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

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather together in worship to proclaim the greatness of the Lord, to rejoice in God our Saviour, and be reminded of how we are looked upon with favour and love. For we have been blessed by the holy name of the Almighty, who does great things for us in grace and mercy. We lean on the strength of God to provide for us, lift us up, and show us the hope, peace, and joy of community and service, to which we have been called and welcomed into, through Jesus Christ, the living Messiah, God With Us. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

And in our worship we light all four candles of this wreath, highlighting our anticipation of God with us, among us, as one of us, showing us the love that has lasted the generations. For in our own fault and shortcoming, God enters our lives and leads us into truth and purpose. Truth in that we are God's beloved, and purpose in that we can declare and reflection this love onto all people, for the sake of this good news of Jesus Christ.

O God of love, come.

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

Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah (#240)

GATHERING SONG: The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came (#265)

GREETING

The peace that comes from the grace of Christ, the hope that comes from the love of God, and the joy that comes from the fellowship of the Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

HYMN OF PRAISE (p. 6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

By your Spirit, O God, may your power be stirred up within us, that we be set free by the righteousness of your presence among us, saved by your Word become flesh, and restored into wholeness by your steadfast love, through Jesus Christ our Saviour 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.

² But 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.

PSALM: Luke 1:46b-55

^{46b} My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
⁴⁷ my 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:
⁴⁹ you, 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.
⁵¹ You 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 forebears,
to Abraham and his children forever.

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.

⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;
⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.
⁷ Then I said, 'See, I have come to do your will, O God'
(in the scroll of the book it is written of me)."

⁸ When 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), ⁹ then he added, “See, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And 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 (TOL p. 10)

GOSPEL: Luke 1:39-45

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.

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

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

May your Word, O Lord, leap up in us, that we might yearn for more of you and your love in our lives, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

You know, while I really do enjoy it, I haven’t actually done much travelling throughout my life, especially when I was younger. I know, this might bring me down a notch in some of your books, which might put me square on notch -1, but I started coming out of my travel shell more as I grew older. While I still haven’t been to a lot of places per se, I have spent most of my time abroad in Hong Kong, as you might have imagined. I mean, most of my wife’s family is there so we would get free room and board, and also a lot of our meals and stuff paid for. It just makes economical sense. But also you’d think that I’d be most comfortable there because I could mostly blend in. Like, I sort of look like the people there, I’m somewhat familiar with the culture and food, and hearing people speak Chinese all the time isn’t too much of a shock for me. But somehow I’m always able to do or say something that totally reminds me that while I might be comfortable, I’m not from there and will never be from there.

There was this one time in particular that stands out to me in my memory. We were at this tailor getting some ill-fitted clothes to fit properly, which wasn’t unusually with my more Canadian-shaped body and stuff, and then I heard it... It wasn’t something that I expected to be shocking, but it was. It wasn’t something that I thought would ring in my ears, but it did. It wasn’t something that I thought I even needed to hear, but at that moment it absolutely was something that made my entire day. What I heard was someone speaking English.

Mind you, it wasn't the same kind of English of the locals, like with an accent or poor grammar or anything, it was definitely a North American English with poor grammar. But at this point it was maybe 2 weeks since I've heard actual North American English that wasn't coming from my wife or my own mouth. So hearing this now... well it was just a sound for sore ears. I didn't think I'd miss hearing it as much as I did until I heard it. My ears piqued, I was drawn to the source, and I felt this feeling in my heart that I was home. It was super weird.

So I did what totally made sense at the time. I walked over and started a conversation. They ended up being this not-so-friendly family from New York who couldn't care less about me or my need to hear more of these utterances from their vocal cords, but that is beside the point. The point is, just the sound of the familiar, that comfort I got from a stranger, that connection to just *anyone* that I could find something in common with... well, I was yearning for that. I needed it. I was longing for it without even knowing.

Now I should say that my current circumstance of being away from Canada so long played a big role in this situation. I'm not drawn to North American English on a daily basis. It was just that at that point, I totally was. You know what I mean, don't you? We all have these moments where we feel an instant connection with someone or something. We see or hear or somehow experience and we feel a wave of not just nostalgia, but warmth, comfort, maybe even love. We all have this yearning for connection, even when we might think or pretend that we don't. Some more than others, of course, but it is within us all.

We see this yearning for connection in today's gospel reading that outlines pregnant Mary's encounter with her pregnant cousin Elizabeth. Mary of course would be carrying Jesus, and Elizabeth, John the baptizer. Two women carrying embryos that would turn out to be two of the most influential people in history. Two women finding themselves pregnant under very strange and even supernatural circumstances. Two women who don't really seem to be from the same region, same age range, or same place in life, but find a connection to each other beyond anything they or we might have imagined.

Elizabeth's baby leapt for joy within her womb for crying out loud. You know how happy you'd have to be to have an unborn baby squirm and kick inside their mom's belly? Well, not a lot as a baby moving around is pretty natural, but you know what I mean. They were so excited to see each other. Ecstatic. Elated, even.

And maybe we'd can say that of course they are, because they know each other, might not have seen each other in a while, and they are family after all. Anyone would be excited to see each other after all that time. That might be true, but I think how the text really focuses on the fact that they're both pregnant tells us it's that what they have in common that really brings out the connection they share.

As with all of us. We all like to hang out with people that we like to hang out with. Usually it's people that we have things in common with. Like similar experiences, similar worldviews, similar love for travel. And this kind of connection might even extend to more superficial commonalities, like what neighbourhood you come from, what high school you attended, and even what sports team you tend to root for. Different communities form online and elsewhere around hobbies, interests, and passions.

These connections we have with each other run deep. They change how we might have initially viewed people, how we regarded them, and how we feel about them moving forward. When we see these connections, we tend to trust more, support more, and love more as now we have something to cling on to in our relationship.

So really, there is something to be said about these connections that we find with each other. We can see how important they are for us in selecting our partners, our friends, our communities. We can see how they help us not just define each other for better or worse, but also define ourselves.

And so I actually think that it's because of this importance of connection that God had decided to enter into our lives as one of us. I think the fact that God would be incarnated in the person of Jesus is the ultimate display of relationship. I think this event of God becoming a person in flesh, to be among us, abide with us, just be with us, is the act of love that we are all, deep down, yearning for.

See God wants to connect with us, have a relationship with us, reveal unending and steadfast love to us, so God became one of us. God, for us, becomes tangible, relatable, and accessible. God gives us God's Word that is useful in teaching and building us up, but then makes it exponentially more understandable by embodying that Word in a human flesh and blood, able to feel every emotion that we feel, from the frustration toward the hypocrites, to the anger toward the corruption, to the love for friends, family, and community. And also this Word-in-flesh becomes susceptible to everything we are susceptible to, like hunger, fatigue, and even death.

This God is truly a God that we can connect with. That out of love for us this God gives us all the reasons in the world to feel that love, see that love, and intimately know that love.

Today is the 4th Sunday of Advent, the last Sunday of Advent before we move into the season of Christmas. It is the Sunday of Advent when we typically focus on the theme of love, and lift up its importance in our lives, in our stories, and in our relationship with each other and God. But I think that this theme isn't just limited to today. Rather love *is* our story with God. Love *is* why we can ever have a relationship with this God, throughout all of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and that really long season after Pentecost. Love *is* God. And God is connected to us and all the saints and us with each other in community. God relates with us and shows us how we can relate and care for each other. And as we'll see in a couple of days, God is with us as one of us, among us and loving us, for all of eternity.

So even in difference, we are connected with God. Even in diversity, we are connected with each other. Even in disagreement, we are all connected and brought into love.

So as we close this season of Advent and move into the season of Christmas, may we always be aware of God's presence in our lives, connecting us with Godself and each other, and showing us all an unending and steadfast love, now and forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Savior of the Nations, Come (#263) verses 1,2,5,6

CREED (TOL p. 12)

With all basking in the love of God, let us proclaim 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 your blessing upon us all might be known throughout our ministry and reach. We especially lift up in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those that use this building for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our bishops, rostered ministers, congregations, 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. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God our Creator, we are blessed by all that you have made and its beauty reflects the holiness of your name. Strengthen us in our stewardship of this planet, that our service and care be faithful and pleasing to you. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God our Shepherd, your strength scatters the proud, humbles the mighty, and confuses the wise. Instill in all world leaders and politicians a trust that your ways of grace and truth can be righteously implemented in the governing of the lands. We pray for the areas of the world that face political turmoil and hardship, that peace might find its way to all corners of the earth. We also pray for the continued support of those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Abraham Barhane; Solyana Amanuel; Filimon Abraha; as well as for those that have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children. 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 Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Debbie; Beulah; Bev and family; John and Betty; Sukhwant; Bishop Kathy; Pastor Kristen; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Hwee Yang; Ephraim; Georgina; Teddy and family; 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 together with you in your kingdom and community. May we all draw strength from the connection we have in your love, that we might faithfully journey into the future as your hands and feet in the world. 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 (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 God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who calls us into humble service to you and each other, 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

Blessed are you, O God, for the birth of creation. Blessed are you, O Christ, for being the light shining in the darkness. Blessed are you, Holy Spirit, for leading and guiding us on the paths of righteousness, where we see our calling to be children of God who are forgiven and saved by the power of love, through Jesus, God incarnate, Word made flesh, the Saviour of us all.

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

And then, after they ate, he took the cup, gave thanks, and passed it around the table for them 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 this bread and cup that we can tangibly see that we are loved and cared for, even as we proclaim this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

And so we remember your Word dwelling among us, full of grace and truth. We remember our welcome and belonging just as we are into your kingdom. We remember the gift of life and love, that saves us from sin and shame and ushers in a new birth for all of creation. All praise and glory be to you, O God, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (TOL p. 17)

Gathered in love and community by the 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

Taste and see, God's gift of love for us all.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 17)

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus (#254)

He Came Down (#253)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, you have saved and delivered us from exile and separation from you, and have welcomed us into community with you and all the saints. May this merciful gift of love be received in gratitude, that it be joyfully reflected in our lives as we continue in the hope of your peace reigning throughout all the earth, in Christ's name. **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: My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness (#251)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, love and be loved.

Thanks be to God.

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