

# *South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges*

*Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023*

**Prelude:** – Christie Coatsworth

## **Welcome & Announcements:**

Continue to keep in touch with others and to share our websites; at [southbuxton.ca](http://southbuxton.ca), and [talbotstreet.ca](http://talbotstreet.ca)

Thank you to Christie Coatsworth for our music this morning. Thank you to Tracey Major for putting together the Power Point slides.

## **Call To Worship:**

**Eric:** We come into this place to make a home for Love.

**People:** **We come to create a structure, to give shelter, to craft a dwelling place for the Incarnation.**

**Eric:** God asks, “Have I ever asked for another dwelling place than in my Creation?”

**People:** **We come into this place to tell the story of a woman who said, “yes”; of a stable and a manger and angels singing before frightened shepherds.**

**Eric:** We come to celebrate the birth of the one who would teach us that his life was the beginning of new life for us all.

**People:** **We come to worship the God who asks us all to say yes to carrying that which will bring hope, peace, joy and love into our world.**

**Eric:** We come into this place to remember.

**People:** **We come into this place to re-imagine our place in God’s incarnation. Let us worship.**

## **Opening Hymn:** VU 43 “Go Tell It on the Mountain” C

*Go, tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere.  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born.*

## **Advent Reflection:**

**Eric:** On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we focus on Love. Even as we wait for Jesus, we wait in Love.

**People:** **Our scripture today shares Mary’s love for God and thanks God for all great gifts. God has gifted us with Creation. God has gifted us God’s Love. God has gifted us with Jesus the Son of God; the one we are waiting for. As we continue our journey through Advent, let us ponder:**

- In what ways are you aware of God’s love? *(pause)*
- What are you most looking forward to this Christmas? *(pause)*
- Are you and those you love, ready for Emmanuel? *(pause)*

## **Opening Hymn:** VU 43 “Go Tell It on the Mountain” V 1

While shepherds kept their watching

o'er silent flocks by night,  
behold, throughout the heavens  
there shone a holy light.

*Go, tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere.*

*Go, tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born.*

### **Lighting of the Advent Candle:**

**Eric:** Who do you say Jesus is?

**People:** To me, as a parent, Jesus is like a beloved child, the love of my life and the joy of my heart.

**Eric:** To me, as a Christian, Jesus is Emmanuel, which means God-with us.

**People:** We wait for Jesus, God-with-us, who spreads love.

*(Light first purple candle for Peace)*

*(Light second purple candle for Hope)*

*(Light Pink candle for Joy)*

*(Light last purple candle for Love)*

**Eric:** We wait for Jesus.

### **Opening Hymn: VU 43 “Go Tell It on the Mountain” V2**

The shepherds feared and trembled  
when lo, above the earth  
rang out the angel chorus  
that hailed our Saviour's birth!

*Go, tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere.*

*Go, tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born.*

### **Acknowledgement:**

**Eric:** Holy One, Creator of the Universe, we praise you with humble hearts.

**People:** For you created us out of dust, frail creatures in deep need of one another.

**Eric:** Yet into our weakness you breathed your Spirit that your love might dwell within us.

**People:** Yet we become prideful in the image of you which we carry.

**Eric:** We puff ourselves up, and we put our desires ahead of the needs of our neighbours.

**People:** Though you took on human form to lead us to eternal life, we seek to contain you within that flesh.

**Eric:** We have tried to domesticate you, to put you in a comfortable box that we can admire and love without having to listen to what you are calling us to do and be.

**People:** Forgive us, God; when we are proud, when we put the acquisition of wealth and status ahead of the care of neighbour and Creation, when we do not feed those who hunger.

**Eric:** When we set ourselves up as rulers over others, help us to know our place.

**People:** When we hear this ancient, beautiful story of your love and help us to reflect on how you continue to speak into our lives today.

**Eric:** Call us again into renewal of the ancient covenant and the promises of your mercy.

**Opening Hymn: VU 43 “Go Tell It on the Mountain” V 3**

Down in a lonely manger  
the humble Christ was born,  
and God sent our salvation  
that blessed Christmas morn.  
*Go, tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere.  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born.*

**Affirmation:**

**People:** God did not wait until we were ready, to call us into participation in the Beloved Community.

**Eric:** God knows our weaknesses, has mercy on our transgressions, and looks with compassion upon our fearfulness.

**People:** Hear the promises of God: we are loved, we are renewed, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God! Amen.

**Opening Hymn: VU 43 “Go Tell It on the Mountain” C**

*Go, tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere.  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born.*

**Children’s Story:**

**Children’s Hymn: VU 577 “I’ve Got Love...”**

I've got love like an ocean,  
I've got love like an ocean,  
    I've got love like an ocean in-a my soul.  
I've got love like an ocean,  
I've got love like an ocean,  
    I've got love like an ocean in-a my soul.

I've got peace like a river,  
I've got peace like a river,  
    I've got peace like a river in-a my soul.  
I've got peace like a river,  
I've got peace like a river,  
    I've got peace like a river in-a my soul.

I've got joy like a fountain,  
I've got joy like a fountain,

I've got joy like a fountain in-a my soul.  
I've got joy like a fountain,  
I've got joy like a fountain,  
I've got joy like a fountain in-a my soul.

**Responsive Psalm: Psalm 89: 1 – 4, 19 - 26**

***The Lord's Agreement with David***

Our Lord, I will sing of your love forever.

**Everyone yet to be born will hear me praise your faithfulness.**

I will tell them, "God's love can always be trusted, and his faithfulness lasts as long as the heavens."

**You said, "David, my servant, is my chosen one, and this is the agreement I made with him:**

David, one of your descendants will always be king."

**In a vision, you once said to your faithful followers: "I have helped a mighty hero. I chose him from my people and made him famous.**

David, my servant, is the one I chose to be king, and I will always be there to help and strengthen him.

**"No enemy will outsmart David, and he won't be defeated by any hateful people.**

I will strike down and crush his troublesome enemies.

**He will always be able to depend on my love, and I will make him strong with my own power.**

I will let him rule the lands across the rivers and seas.

**He will say to me, 'You are my Father and my God, as well as the mighty rock where I am safe.'**

**Scripture: Luke 1: 26 - 38**

***An Angel Tells about the Birth of Jesus***

One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you." Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end." Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen? I am not even married!" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God's power will come over you. So your child will be called the holy Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she will have a son. Nothing is impossible for God!" Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said." And the angel left her.

**Reflection: "We Wait in Love"**

We as Christians are asked each Christmas to use our imaginations in "seeing" the creation of Jesus. We in the 21<sup>st</sup> century only get to read or hear the story of Mary and Joseph – we do not get to experience the story in person. Yet if we did - what would our response likely be? Would we believe Mary's story, or would we be one of those angry folks - when girls get pregnant before they are married? It is only in these past few generations where it is more common for parents to have children out of wedlock.

Churches throughout the last century or so in Canada have created spaces, usually in big cities like Toronto, where unwed-to-be mothers could have their baby born (pretty much in secret), put their baby up for adoption, and then return home, as if nothing had happened. That was the way we and the church wanted it.

Today I know how disappointed I would be if one of our grandsons, fathered a child out of wedlock. Although in today's society, it happens all the time. I'd have to get over it, but it is hard for us as grandparents to imagine that happening to us. It's still harder to imagine Mary and the divine intervention, even today 2,100 years later. How would anyone believe Mary so many centuries ago? Much like our past generations, Mary is sent to see her Aunt some towns away. Aunt Elizabeth would need a hand, and so does Mary.

Sending Mary away actually sounds like it would be good protection. We have heard stories about what happens to women and babies that are conceived out of wedlock. It still happens today even in Canada. Abortions are terrifying, and many times the decision is not the Mother's, and the decision is definitely not the baby's choice. It's an unbelievable tough situation to be Mary. So tough, that Mary can only be calmed by Gabriel – God's top angel. Gabriel comes and shares with Mary all that God is doing. Mary believes! Mary says, "If that's what God wants to do, then that is what will happen." It seems for Mary to be reasonable acceptance. Mother Mary is known to all women, to be a woman of incredible faith. Mary is so revered by women in all denominations and faiths.

Gabriel appears to be the bringer of "good tidings" in announcing both the births of John the Baptist to a barren older woman, and the birth of Jesus to a young virgin girl. Seeing Gabriel is hard to imagine. For Zechariah, it was unbelievable that his wife Elizabeth, old in years (we are told), and unable to have children, even though they have tried for many years, would become pregnant and have a son. "You are to name him John". What would you think, if this happened to you today? Exactly!

You would likely do exactly what Zechariah did – he doubted Gabriel – "How can this happen"? Gabriel puts a curse on Zechariah, so Zechariah could not speak until all of this happens, as Gabriel has told him. Gabriel says, "It will happen"!

Can we as the church ever imagine God speaking to us? If so, would we believe? Does it really require for us to believe? Not really - Gabriel says, "It will happen"! It does not matter what we believe or what we expect – God does what God needs to do! Our job is to get onboard or get out of the way. How would we imagine God using us? How would we imagine God coming into the world? What would we

imagine what it means to be a bearer of God – someone such as Mary? There are times when we as the church, think that God thinks like we do. After all “WE” are made in God’s likeness. The point is, “we” are made in God’s likeness – not God is made in our likeness! It makes a big difference.

God will break into our world in God’s time and on God’s terms. Mary knew that, or at least Mary believed that, as she said, “If this is God’s plan – Let’s do it”. But really it does not take you or I to entice God. It takes God to entice us! God loves us so much, God sent his son to be with us in this world. To tell us about God and God’s vision for us, including us the church!

Today’s story is told to the church, but it is a story that is known throughout all of our culture. Much of our culture is based on God’s love for us and even our love for one another. Christmas songs are being played in stores and on the radio. The television is full of Christmas stories, even religious ones. If at any time in our culture that culture embraces the Church – Christmas is it!

Yes, at Christmas ordinary people celebrate the birth of a baby boy, born in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes – but we/they all know this is a special baby – a very special baby. Today we are bursting in anticipation and in Love for that special baby boy to be born once again in our world. We wait in Love, knowing that the one who is to come is because of God, not because of us. Emmanuel – God is with us. We could never imagine such a story. We could never create such a story. But God can and God does! We are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

**Hymn: VU 64 “O Little Town of Bethlehem”**

- 1 O little town of Bethlehem,  
    how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
    the silent stars go by;  
yet in thy dark streets shineth  
    the everlasting light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years  
    are met in thee tonight.
- 2 For Christ is born of Mary;  
    and gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep  
    their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars, together

proclaim the holy birth,  
and praises sing to God the King,  
and peace to all on earth.

3 How silently, how silently  
the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessed gift of heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming;  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him, still  
the dear Christ enters in.

4 O holy child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin, and enter in;  
be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
our Lord Emmanuel.

### **Invitation to Share Our Gifts:**

**Eric:** As we wait in Love - let us give in Love.

### **Offertory: VU 541 "Praise God From Whom..."**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

### **Offertory Prayer:**

**Creator God, we bring our gifts and ourselves, our treasure and our heart. Bless us, in all that we offer, that our offerings might be used in your call to us: to be stewards of your Creation. Bless us, that in our giving, we might open ourselves to your call to love all that you have created, for to love all that you love. Amen.**

### **Hymn: VU 400 "Lord, Listen To Your Children Praying"**

Lord, listen to your children praying,  
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;  
Lord, listen to your children praying,  
send us love, send us power, send us grace!

## **Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer:**

### **Closing Hymn: VU 60 "O Come, All Ye Faithful"**

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem:  
come and behold him, born the King of angels;  
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

God of God, light of light,  
lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb;  
very God, begotten, not created:  
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,  
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;  
glory to God in the highest:  
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

See how the shepherds summoned to his cradle,  
leaving their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear;  
we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps;  
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to thee be glory given;  
word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:  
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

### **Benediction:**

**Eric:** Go out into the world, with Hope, with Peace, with Joy and in Love, now and forever more.

### **VU 7: Love is a Flame: (verse 4)**

Love is a flame that burns in our heart,  
Jesus has come and will never depart.  
When God is a child there's joy in our song.  
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,  
and none shall be afraid.

### **Postlude: – Christie Coatsworth**

**Carol  
Susan  
Barb  
Margie  
Jerry  
Erin**

**Larry  
Ken  
Natalie  
Joan  
Rick**

**David  
Dave**

**Elizabeth  
Mike and Janice  
Barb  
Rick**

**Don  
Audrey  
Harry/Ruth  
Joyce  
Heather**

**Dani  
Barb  
Branson  
Carol  
Wayne & Susan  
Ian  
Ed  
Connie  
Declan  
Marg**

