

South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 18th, 2022

Prelude: by Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Tonight at 7 pm, the Blenheim Ministerial is hosting a Carol Sing at the Talbot Trail Park in Blenheim. Bring a lawn chair, blanket and mug for Hot Chocolate or Coffee.

Thank you for your support of all our past services, which are posted on our websites - Southbuxton.ca and Talbotstreet.ca

Call to Worship:

Eric: God's people ask for signs of God's presence. Emmanuel! God with us!

People: From ancient times, they have called upon God for salvation. Emmanuel! God with us!

Eric: "Shine your face upon us," they cry.

People: Emmanuel! God with us! And an angel said to Joseph:

Eric: Emmanuel! God with us! Come, let us worship God!

Lighting of the Advent Candle:

Eric: Come and let us build a new creation because a child will be born to us.

People: Mary and Joseph will name him Jesus, and he will be our Emmanuel.

Eric: This child will remind us through all the bleakness of this world.

People: God is with us.

Eric: In this moment, as the great Season of Advent nears its end, and we prepare to welcome this child into the bleakest corners of our ordinary lives, salvation is nearer than it has ever been.

People: That light comes into the world and is never extinguished and so today we bring another candle to join our PEACE (*Light the first purple candle*), our HOPE (*Light the second purple candle*), and JOY (*Light the pink candle*) to open ourselves to LOVE again (*Light the last candle*).

Eric: With this light, we pray:

People: O God, we place this light in this holy space as a reminder that we are on this journey together. Be light along all our paths. Lead us to a more just world and help us to stay awake and present to your love in each ordinary day. Amen.

Hymn: VU 64 "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

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.

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.

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.

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..

Children's Story & Lord's Prayer:

Children's Hymn: VU 6 "A Candle is Burning"

A candle is burning, a candle of peace,
a candle to signal that conflict must cease:
for Jesus is coming to show us the way;
a message of peace humbly laid in the hay.

A candle is burning, a flame warm and bright,
a candle of hope in December's dark night.
While angels sing blessings from heaven's starry sky,
our hearts we prepare now for Jesus is nigh.

A candle is burning, a candle of joy,
a candle to welcome brave Mary's new boy.
Our hearts fill with wonder, and eyes light and glow

as joy brightens winter like sunshine on snow.

A candle is burning, a candle of love,
a candle to point us to heaven above.

A baby for Christmas, a wonderful birth,
for Jesus is bringing God's love to our earth.

Scripture: Matthew 1: 18 - 25 "A Baby is Born"

Joseph was in his carpenter's shop sitting on a stool that he had just finished making. The sun was streaming through the window. Joseph was thinking about all that had happened to him the day before and last night.

Mary had come to him to tell him that she would have a baby; the baby was from God. Joseph didn't know what to say or do. He had promised to marry Mary, but he wasn't sure he could anymore. Joseph decided that he would tell Mary that he couldn't marry her, but the more he thought about this, the more he didn't know what to do. He decided that he would have to go to sleep that night and tell her the next morning.

While he was sleeping, Joseph had a dream. In the dream, he saw an angel of God who told him to go ahead and marry Mary because she had told him the truth. The baby she would have was from the Holy Spirit, sent by God.

The angel also told him that the baby's name would be Jesus, which in Hebrew meant Saviour. Jesus would save all the people from any bad things going on in their lives.

Joseph was surprised by all this, but the angel told him even more. The angel said that these things were happening just like one of the prophets had said. The prophet said that a young woman would give birth to a child and that the child would be known as Emmanuel, which means "God is with us."

Joseph was a faithful and caring man. He went to Mary's place and told her what had happened. He said that he would marry her and have the baby and call him Jesus.

Message: "God With Us"

Matthew shares the good news that Joseph will become a father of a child he is to name Emmanuel, God is with us, and we become more aware of how common this name is in our ordinary lives. The angels tell Joseph to be not afraid, which perhaps feels like an impossible task. There is a lot of baggage with Joseph's dream. He is to marry his young bride, who is pregnant with a special child. Mary tells Joseph all this but it is hard to believe. The angel comes to Joseph and retells the story. It still is hard to believe, and Joseph will have to put up with criticism from his community over the next several months at least. Tradition would say, "Do not marry her". Love says, "Marry her". Today we celebrate the theme of love, as we wait one more week for the birth of Emmanuel – "God with us".

Today's story is from the Gospel of Matthew. Last week's story was from the Gospel of Luke. Luke highlights Mary, and her reactions to the news. Matthew highlights Joseph, his dilemma and his final decision. Like Mary, Joseph must trust

God with the loss of his life as he knew and imagined it and lean into an entirely new way of being. Christmas does that to you!

Christmas changes us Christians. Each year, a week before the New Year, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel – “God with us”. In the weeks leading up to Jesus’ birth, we live out Jesus’ mission of feeding the poor, visiting with the lonely and making God’s Kingdom come to life in our community. Because of the birth of Christ, we see the world and especially our neck of the woods differently. Well as we should, as we believe “God is with us” - Emmanuel.

Today we hear the story of Joseph, and once again we (as Christians have for centuries) struggle with how to accept Joseph, as the husband of Mary. It feels awkward – like if Matthew had not told the story who would care? Yet, Matthew makes clear in this story that it is by Joseph’s ancestry that Jesus becomes the son of David. Without David’s lineage through Joseph, the power of Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures falls apart. Matthew is all about taking the Hebrew Scriptures and showing everyone, including us, that the scriptures are fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.

We in the 21st century could say that Joseph is Jesus’ father through adoption. We understand God and the Holy Spirit to be the other half of the birth equation. Any other understanding becomes awkward with the birth of Jesus that the stories suggest is from the line of David. As modern day children are adopted into loving and caring families, Jesus was accepted with the love and respect that Joseph had for Mary and the Holy Spirit, and was welcomed into Joseph’s family.

Matthew shares that the Holy Spirit told Joseph to name the baby Jesus. In Jesus’ day, it was customary for mothers to name their babies. So for Matthew, since Joseph names the baby Jesus, scripture is fulfilled that Jesus is from the line of David. Also we understand that Jesus is divine as well as human. Matthew puts this all together for us in today’s story.

For us in the first world and in the 21st century we must remember that in Jesus’ time (and still in many cultures and traditions today), naming someone’s ancestors gives clues to their very essence, the kind of person they are, even the sort of occupational talents they will instinctively possess.

Besides lineage, another piece of world view that differs so much between Jesus’ time and now - is the place of dreams. In Jesus’ day, dreams were considered a legitimate channel by which God revealed divine will to individuals. The church fathers wrestled with what to make of dreams. How might we tell whether a dream

comes from God or from the devil? Many church fathers have spoke into this discussion. In our time, Carl Jung named the critical connection between our dreams and our sense of God, and the difference between “big dreams” and smaller dreams. Joseph had a big dream, and he heeded it. Despite the call to defy convention and risk social and economic disaster, Joseph trusted God.

Today is the last Sunday of our Advent journey. Next Saturday night is Christmas Eve and a Saviour is born. This may cause us to think about our own dreams. Do our dreams connect us to our sense of belonging to God’s family? How might we work the mysteries and miracles of the Holy Spirit into our dreams?

Have you ever felt that you received a message in a dream? Did you act on the message (as did Joseph), or did you dismiss it as “only a dream”? How might your life be different now if you had chosen the other course? What would need to happen in a dream for you to awake believing you had heard God’s voice?

The phrase “God with us” was a powerful message of hope to the Hebrew people in exile and to the early Christian community. How might “God with us” be a powerful message to you and I in the 21st Century? The coming together of God’s “yes” with our “yes” is called the place of Holy Desire in Christianity’s spiritual or mystical traditions. This is not simply a quiet, sacred space but the launching pad of a transfigured and highly creative life. Today we celebrate in Love, because we are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Hymn: VU 43 “Go, Tell It on the Mountain”

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

While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
behold, throughout the heavens
there shone a holy light. R

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

Down in a lonely manger
the humble Christ was born,
and God sent our salvation

that blessed Christmas morn.

Invitation to Share Our Gifts:

Eric: We see God in the ordinary places of our lives – sometimes without realizing it. We see God with us when we hold a hand, offer a smile, feed a stranger. God is with us when we offer the first fruits of our labours, as God’s people have done for generations. Let us give God the fruits of our labours as an act of worship and gratitude.

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:

People: God, may these ordinary gifts of paper and card swipes, of coins and electronic transactions, honour you. May the everyday gifts of our lives honour you and the work we do in your name. 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:

Hymn: VU 46 “Gentle Mary Laid Her Child”

Gentle Mary laid her child lowly in a manger;
there he lay, the undefiled, to the world a stranger.
Such a babe in such a place, can he be the Saviour?
Ask the saved of all the race who have found his favour.

Angels sang about his birth, wise men sought
and found him;
heaven's star shone brightly forth, glory all around him.
Shepherds saw the wondrous sight,
heard the angels singing;
all the plains were lit that night,
all the hills were ringing.

Gentle Mary laid her child lowly in a manger;
he is still the undefiled, but no more a stranger.
Son of God of humble birth, beautiful the story;

praise his name in all the earth; hail the King of glory!

Benediction:

Eric: Go forth in joy to tell the world: Emmanuel! God with us! now and forever more.

VU 7: Love is a Flame:

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.

Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude: – Christie Coatsworth

Prayers: - Please include these people in your prayers this week.

We have offered prayer for these people each Sunday morning just before the Zoom Service.
It was suggested to share these names with the total group – as “In the Spirit We Are One”.

Cancer: Chris

**Paul
Sarah
Carol
Maureen
Susan
Cara**

Reg and Mary Jane

**Dave
Bill
Jane
Donna**

Martin and Family

**Larry
Kerigan
Fran
John
Ken
Grace
Mel
Natalie
Susan
Joan
Ingrid
Johnathan**

Terry's Family