

South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 19th, 2021

Prelude: “O, How A Rose E'er Blooming” – by Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Welcome to St. Andrew's today as we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Advent celebrating love.

Thank you for your donations and all the help with the Merlin and Area Community Assistance Christmas Baskets. We delivered 60 baskets on last Friday, December 17th.

Our Christmas Eve Service will be online and delivered to your mailbox. We will have no service on Boxing Day December 26th.

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

Thank you to our production crew; music by Christie Coatsworth, readings by Annette Skillings and the slides by Tracey Major. You make all the difference. Thank you!

Call to Worship:

Eric: God is making great changes to our world. Are you ready?

Sung Response: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

People: We have come to do God's will: to work for justice, to bring balance back to our living.

Sung Response: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

Eric: God is making great changes to our world. Are you ready?

Sung Response: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

People: We have come to do God's will: to seek and celebrate God's surprising love, to establish God's Realm here on earth.

Sung Response: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

Eric: Come, let us worship God, who comes into our world in love; to reconcile and make things new.

Sung Response: “O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel”.

Lighting of the Advent Candles:

(Light the first purple candle – Candle of Hope)

(Light the second purple candle – Candle of Peace)

(Light the pink candle – Candle of Joy)

Eric: For the child leaping in Mary's womb, we light this candle of love.

People: For the labour required by you and by me to bring peace, we light this candle of love.

Eric: For generation upon generation that need this blessing again, we light this candle of love.

People: For the will to imagine another world is possible, we light this candle of love.

Eric: For the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we light this candle of love.

People: For the work of birth we share on Christmas, we light this candle of love.

(Light the last purple candle – Candle of Love)

Hymn: VU 64 “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (Video)

- 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 men on earth.
- 3 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.

Scripture: Luke 1: 39 - 55 “Mary Remembers”- by

Pilgrims and merchants often stayed overnight in Bethlehem when they were on their way to Egypt. But it was never crowded like this. Camels and donkeys, dogs and wagons clogged the narrow roads that led into town. People were everywhere. Mary and Joseph looked around. It had been a long and tiring journey from their home in Nazareth, and now what were they to do? Where would they stay? Mary would soon have a baby.

Mary decided to sit on a wooden bench and wait while Joseph went from house to house looking for a room where they might stay. While Mary waited, she thought back to the very first moment the angel Gabriel appeared and announced to her that she would have a baby. What a surprise that was! Not long after, she left the city of Nazareth and travelled south to a town in the hill country of Judea. Elizabeth, a relative, was having a special baby, too.

Mary remembered calling out to Elizabeth when she neared her home. And she could still remember Elizabeth’s words and actions when she opened the door and saw her. “Mary,” she cried and hugged her at the same time. “It is so good to see you. I am filled with such joy! I just felt my baby inside me move. It is almost as if the baby had heard your call. God has blessed you. And you are going to have a very special baby.”

A thin ray of moonlight crept across Mary’s face as she shifted on the bench. Memories of her time with Elizabeth brought a smile to her face. For three months, they had shared stories, sang songs, prayed together, and prepared for the birth of their babies. Tears of joy ran down Mary’s face as she hummed the song she so often sang while they sat in the garden...

*With all my heart, I praise God.
I am so happy!
For God has blessed me
and done great things for me.
How good and wonderful is God!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten.
Holy is God’s name.
God feeds the hungry and helps the poor.
God remembers our people, our families, our friends.
God’s promises live in us today.
How good and wonderful is God!*

“Yes,” thought Mary, “I am blessed for sure.” And she raised her head to see a loving Joseph coming toward her. She could see in his eyes that it was okay. Soon her baby would be born – her song would have a place in the world.

Message: “Nurturing God’s Promise”

God’s work of salvation is full of surprises. God chooses two women to nurture a revolution: Young Mary will be the mother of Jesus and the elderly Elizabeth will bear a son, John. God chooses little Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah. The prophetic voices of Mary and Elizabeth invite us to rejoice in the surprising joy and justice of God’s reign.

Though the scene may seem ordinary, surprise is in the air. As Elizabeth and Mary, both pregnant, share a heart-to-heart conversation in a small town in the Judean hills, a revolution is beginning. Their words of prophecy point to a reversal of our human understandings of power, justice, and salvation.

A Saviour, the messiah, had been promised to God’s people long before the time of Elizabeth and Mary. It was hoped that this Saviour would change the political and social landscape of Jerusalem much like King David did 1,000 years earlier. To the religious faithful in their day, it would have seemed quite unlikely that two women – one old and one very young – would be bringing the Messiah into our world. Yet in Luke’s gospel, this is exactly how God works.

Mary is excited after her visit from the angel Gabriel and hurries to the home of her relative Elizabeth. As Mary enters, Elizabeth’s unborn child – who will be the prophet John – leaps in joy at Mary’s greeting. The Spirit inspires Elizabeth to bless Mary and her child. In Mary’s child, God is coming in flesh and blood into the world. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of this Saviour, Jesus, who shatters all expectations of God’s power and might.

Mary stays with Elizabeth for three months. As their relationship grows, Mary and Elizabeth empower each other to be God’s bearer of the Saviour of the World. Luke is the one that reminds us that God’s reign of hope and justice will come in ways that surprise us, filling us with joy. In Luke, the ordinary people are the ones who bring plenty; women are the ones to foster a revolution; and God chooses to work powerfully in and through those who appear powerless.

Mary sings the glory of God’s powerful love, because God has chosen her to carry the Christ child. She sings because God lifts those who are considered lowly, scatter those who are proud, and feed those who are hungry. Mary sings for all the generations who have hoped, and hope even still, for God’s promise of justice to be

fulfilled in their lives. Mary song is for all the generations; from Jesus' time, to our time today and into the distant future.

As surprising that it might seem and as hard it is to believe, God also chooses to act in our lives. Through the Holy Spirit we are blessed as we hear the story. We cannot wait to sing our beloved Christmas carols that remind us that Emmanuel changes the world. We too rejoice that the Holy Spirit fills us with power, that in our ordinary lives, we too might bear God to the world.

There is a strong connection between Elizabeth and Mary. Both women are nurturing new life inside them. Whenever two or more people gather together when they are sharing the same life experiences, they naturally support one another. Luke shares how Elizabeth nurtures and reassures Mary during her time of pregnancy. Elizabeth blesses Mary for believing that she will bear God's son. As hard as it is for Mary to process Gabriel's visit, Elizabeth becomes Mary's safe place during what would be considered a troubling, yet exciting, time.

Mary's Song or "The Magnificat" are some of the most beautiful verses in the Bible to many scholars. Very likely because Mary's words are a reversal of what humans expect in regard to power, justice, and salvation. Folks cannot help but marvel at the depth and wonder of this young woman.

As Elizabeth and Mary greet one another, we feel the stirring of excitement. For many of us today, we remember what it was like to be with child, and how we appreciated someone to be by our side. For all of us, we know Christmas is nigh – just around the corner. This raises our excitement levels, regardless of our age.

This year's Advent journey has been filled with the voices of the prophets of old. Today Advent closes with the words of Mother Mary, a young, pregnant, unmarried, peasant girl who sings with confidence the praises of a mighty God. She declares justice for the marginalized. She exclaims that the lowly will be lifted up and that the hungry will be fed while the rich are sent away empty. Unlike most women of her day, Mary is not powerless. Indeed, God empowers Mary to carry God's love into the world.

God continues to speak through prophets today. Into a world marked by chaos, a pandemic, violence and human divisions in our worldly events, God will bring forth love, hope, and possibility. That is the Good News each one of us can share. We too may consider ourselves ordinary people, but teamed with the power of the Holy Spirit, we too become messengers of today's world. We are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Hymn: VU 44 “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” – Video

- 1 It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold,
'Peace on the earth, good will to men,
from heaven's all-gracious King!'
The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.
- 2 Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled;
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.
- 3 For, lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophets seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold,
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendours fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.

Invitation to Share Our Gifts:

Eric: We live in the wonderful reality of God's promise. We live in the love of God's new day. Let us give thanks to God as we share our gifts and make an offering.

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: We offer this day all that we are and all that we will be. We receive God's abundance born in Jesus, God's child. We give back to God as we see Christ in all God's children. We give in the name of the One we are prepared for. Amen.

Hymn: VU 400 “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:

Eric: God birthing hope, fill us with kindness and compassion.

People: Give us eyes to search you out in the least likely of places.

Eric: Fill our lives with hope!

People: God birthing peace, fill our world with all that is green and growing.

Eric: Give us hands to tend this earthly garden and to care for your children everywhere.

People: Fill our world with peace!

Eric: God birthing joy, fill this holy place of St. Andrew’s, St. Luke’s and Talbot Street United Churches with singing and dancing as we serve in your way.

People: Fill your people with joy!

Eric: God birthing love, fill our days with story and memory.

People: Open us once more to new beginnings and to as many possibilities as there are stars in the sky.

Eric: Fill our lives with love, as we offer that special prayer...

*Our Father, Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven,
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us,
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

Blessing:

Eric: Go now into the world, knowing the love God has placed within you. With God’s love, together may we change the world, now and forever more.

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: “Christmas Time Is Here” – Vince Guaraldi – 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:	Tom	Jack
	Louise	Louise' Granddaughter - Blake
	Betty	Ingrid
	Alison	Brenda
	Nancy	Jim
	Brian	Jack
	Zoe	Becky
	Barry/ Marsha	Francine
	Adrein	Gary
	Melissa	Karen
	Lloyd	Jim
	Flo	Sherie & Will
	George	Hunter – Doctor
	Jenny	Janet / Tracey
	Evan – Concussion	British Columbia & Nova Scotia
	Shawna	Wallen Family
	Van Raay Family – House fire	Sarah
	Ethan – Brian Surgery	Donna