

South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 20th, 2020

Prelude: “Cold is the Morning” – (French Bohemian Carol) – Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Good morning!

The South Buxton Pastoral Charge and Talbot Street have done a great job of supporting Kenesserie Camp (\$ 3,655), and the Wheatley Community Chest (\$ 725), the Wheatley Food Bank (\$ 2,115) and the Potato Project (\$ 380). Thank you for your support.

The Merlin and Blenheim Christmas Baskets were distributed on Thursday. The Wheatley Community Chest Hampers were distributed on Saturday. All programs have increased numbers this year. Because of your donations, many families including new families will enjoy a blessed Christmas.

Christmas Eve is only four days away. We have recorded a Christmas pageant by Zoom. On Christmas Eve; join us on Zoom at 7 pm, or check out southbuxton.ca to download the Christmas Eve Service. Please bring a candle to the service - as we will be lighting candles at the end as we traditionally do.

If you are interested in a Blue Christmas Service, Wheatley United Church is offering their yearly Blue Christmas Service virtually, tomorrow night at 5 pm. You can watch it from their website at wheatleyunitedchurch.com

As part of Light up Chatham Kent, we have decorated the trees east of St. Andrew's United Church with lights. The hamlet of South Buxton looks great this year with all the decorations. It is amazing!

Continue to keep in touch with others and to share our websites; at southbuxton.ca, and 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.

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)*

Hymn: VU 1 "O Come O Come Emmanuel" Verse 1

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lowly exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Lighting of the Advent Candle:

Video: "Jesus, God-With-Us"

Eric: Who do you say Jesus is?

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

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

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

(Light last purple Advent candle for Love)

Eric: We wait for Jesus.

Hymn: VU 1 "O Come O Come Emmanuel" Verse 7

O come, Desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind;
O bid our sad divisions cease,
and be for us the Prince of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

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.

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.

Scripture: Luke 1: 26 - 38

For a long time, God's people had called on God to send a new leader to release them from the control of brutal invading armies and foreign rulers. They also hoped for a leader who would help them to live more fully in God's ways of justice and peace. One night, an ordinary young woman named Mary had a surprise visit.

Mary and Joseph lived in a small town called Nazareth. They were planning to marry each other.

Late one night, when she was all by herself, Mary felt there was someone with her. She couldn't see anyone. "Are you an angel?" Mary asked in a tiny voice. Mary had never seen an angel, but somehow she was sure this was an angel.

Then someone spoke to her, "Be happy, Mary! God has chosen you for a wonderful thing. You are going to have a special baby. You must call this baby Jesus, because he is God's chosen one, God's Messiah."

"But how can that be?" asked Mary. "I'm not married."

"God will make this happen in a way that you will find hard to understand," said the angel.

Mary looked puzzled. "Mary," said the angel, "I will tell you something wonderful that will help you believe me. Remember your cousin Elizabeth?"

"Oh, yes," said Mary.

"Elizabeth is growing old. She and her husband are sad because they didn't have any children. But Elizabeth is going to have a baby, too."

Mary was glad to hear the good news about Elizabeth. But she was also afraid for herself. In those days people got angry when women had babies before they were married. She was afraid people would hurt her because she was pregnant. Still, Mary loved God very much.

"Well," Mary said very slowly, "If that's what God wants to do, then that is what will happen."...

Message: "We Wait In Love"

We as Christians are asked each Christmas to use our imaginations in “seeing” the creation of Jesus. We in the 21st 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, on the radio and 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:

Eric: God of Love; throughout history, you have been active in this world, speaking, guiding, whispering, and nudging us to be the people you know we can be.

People: **You have spoken through angels, messengers of your grace, justice, and love.**

Eric: You have spoken through prophets, the truth-tellers of our world who call us from self-interest to community, from human limitation to divine vision.

People: **You have spoken from our own flesh, embodying all that it means to be human.**

Eric: From your newborn cry to your final, heartbroken words, you spoke to us of the abiding love and the enduring covenant, which have never failed, no matter how often we have turned away.

People: **You have spoken, Holy God, throughout all generations.**

Eric: Help us to hear you speaking to us now.

People: **Help us to take the ancient stories of our faith and learn from them, as Mary did.**

Eric: Help us to re-imagine the words of prophecy that still speak truth to our lives - that we might learn to respond to the enduring truth of your call.

People: **Help us to resist the temptations that have followed humanity since the beginning.**

Eric: May we set aside the idols of wealth and status, self-interest and self-importance.

People: **May we rethink that being made in the image of God - means that God is just like us.**

Eric: Help us to re-imagine what it might look like to say “yes” when we hear your call; and to focus on what may be possible.

People: **Help us to carry you within ourselves.**

Eric: Help us to embody your holy love so that our souls, our words and our deeds, magnify you.

People: **Help us to remember that being your children depends on what is within the very love of our hearts.**

Eric: Help us to say, “yes” to you, God of Love, as we share Jesus’ 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.

Benediction:

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

VU 7: Hope Is a Star: *(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: "O Come Little Children" – (German Folk Song) – 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".

In hospital:	Cleata		Askew Family
	Ken	Special:	Doug
Cancer:	Wayne		June
	Karen		Melonie
	Ian		Susan
	Jasmine		Becky
	Tom		Jerri
	Randy		