

Dec 20 2020 ADVENT IV Service of Word and Prayer

We are using the Service of the Word liturgy this morning, from your green hymn book, the Lutheran Book of Worship, page 126. The prayers are based on Sundays & Seasons.

Shut off all the distractions in your home. Enjoy the quiet for a bit – take in some deep breaths. Light your candle. May your family be blessed in this time together. Include your Advent wreath as part of your home worship centre. If you don't have a table wreath, you could use 4 candles, (or battery operated votives) for the Advent season. Usually there are 3 blue candles and 1 pink one. Many people also add a white candle on Christmas Day.

The Gathering

Greeting: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Hymn: WOV 632, ELW 265 - The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came

Dialogue p.127

Blessed is he who comes as king, who comes in the name of the Lord.
Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
I will hear what the Lord has to say - a voice that speaks for peace.
Peace for all people and his friends and those who turn to him in their hearts.
His help is near for those who fear him, and his glory will live in our land.
Blessed is he who comes as king, who comes in the name of the Lord.
Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

God has made us his people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith.

The Apostles' 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.

The Lord be with you ~ and also with you.

Stir up your power, Lord Christ and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the things that would obstruct your mercy, so that we may willingly bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lighting the Advent Wreath: Advent IV

Use this blessing when lighting all four candles.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe. In your Son, Emmanuel, you have shown us your light and saved us from the power of sin. Bless us as we light the candles on this wreath. Increase our longing for your presence, that at the celebration of your Son's birth his Spirit might dwell anew in our midst, for he is our light and our salvation. Blessed be God forever. **Amen.**

The Word

The Old Testament lesson is from 2 Samuel 7:1-11,16

Psalms 89: 1-4, 19-26 is found on page 256

The New Testament lesson is from Romans 16:25-27

Please rise for the gospel lesson.

Holy, Holy, Holy, our hearts adore you. Our hearts are glad to say the words: you are Holy God.

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38 Glory to you o Lord / Praise to you o Christ.

Sermon ~ Rev. Norine Gullons

God doesn't pay attention at all to the value judgements we place on human worth. Sometimes we think about people's economic status. We ask where do they live? or What kind of car do they drive? Usually the answers to these questions may determine how much power we think individuals have in the community and the amount of respect we think they command.

By economic standards, Mary of Nazareth lived in poverty. If you remember the rest of the story - Mary could only provide two doves for her own post-natal purification rite. Two doves was the minimal offering. She was betrothed to one of her countrymen Joseph. Both were descended from the royal house of David.

Poverty was not a spiritual barrier for God. Neither was her age or youth. Biblical scholars suggest that Mary was maybe 15 or 16 when God's surprising announcement came to her. Those of you who have teens in your family know or remember the ups and downs of those days. In biblical days the hierarchy of age measured religious experience.

Luke tells us today poverty and youth yield to God's will. But God does not play favorites. The most significant meeting between God and a human takes place with one young woman. Mary finds herself selected for a key role in God's great plan. I am sure that this humble girl was puzzled and troubled by Gabriels' words but eventually agrees to become the centre and the support of all the ages.

I'll try to set the scene for us. It is an ordinary room with everyday furniture, utensils, common floors and ceiling. Mary is there. We don't see an open door. But we do see an angel kneeling in front of Mary. The window blinds are partially open. Think of

how she may have shrank back trembling afraid of this foreign being speaking to her – an angel.

The Lord gives us signs and landmarks on our life's journey. God knew Mary needed very strong landmarks. She was about to do something no one else had done before. She was the virgin whom Isaiah had prophesied would deliver the messiah to the world. This Gift is not from man to God - it is from God to man. Max Lucado once wrote these words: "Salvation is God –given, God driven, God empowered, and God originated."

I don't know how much Mary knew, but I do know she knew an angel had come to her. The angel told her, "The Holy Spirit" will come upon you, the power of the highest hover over you and the child you bring to birth will be called the Holy Son of God.

Of course Mary asks the ultimate question. How can this be? Her reaction to the angel Gabriel's visit is cautious at best. Living in a remote village far from the busy religious centre of Jerusalem-she had no hint that she was destined for such a distinctive role.

We understand that phrase . . . how can this be? It is a collective cry of anguish that is raised when a calamity or catastrophe hits a community or a school or a neighborhood or a family. How can this be? We think we lead unassuming lives- in out of the way places and that we are isolated from the extraordinary. But we know in our day and age with 24hour media coverage that neither news, notoriety or a calamity is limited to major metropolitan areas. The selection of Mary to be the mother of Jesus is very unpredictable and this opens us up to the unexpected and the unimaginable.

The extraordinary thing about Mary is precisely her ordinariness – as Mary is a member of the priesthood of all believers who emulates for all of us – that we all are included in the work of God.

Jesus came to fulfill the law. . . .because we couldn't. and the only way he could fulfill the law was to become one of us. But how can you fulfill the law if it doesn't apply to you. He had to become one of us. To be tempted just like us. And to say no to the temptation. Then after thirty years of saying no he drank the cup, carried our sin, took our place, died in our place and rose from the dead.

Mary is in a position of bearing an honor yoked with struggle. An unmarried woman expecting a child. Poverty and daily struggle for survival. Until she at last conceded to her destiny. "here I am the servant of the lord: let it be with me according to your word."

Mary's words deliver God's true Christmas wish. That we the followers of Christ will believe that nothing is impossible with God, and we invite the Holy Spirit to work through us to attain miracles. John 1:12 "that to as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the children of God."

And isn't that the very point of Christmas? God says to all of us today: "hail o favoured ones, the Lord is with you. He comes, crossing roughshod across all barriers, to share His life with you. Have faith and believe. Amen

Hymn: LBW 58, ELW 272 - Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Our Response

OFFERING PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things.

You have set before us these gifts of your good creation. Prepare us for your heavenly banquet, nourish us with food and drink, and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world, through the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Prayers of the people are led by Mark Boese

God of power and might, fulfill your promise and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need. *A brief silence.*

Gracious God, all generations call you blessed. In this holy season we pray for our neighbors of other denominations and faiths. Inspire the faith of their people. Cultivate understanding among us and strengthen us in love and service to our community. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creator God, you scatter the proud. Everything we have belongs first to you. Bless and protect the seas, mountains, plains, forests, skies, and soils that surround us. Give us humility as we tend them. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Righteous God, you humble the powerful and lift up the lowly. We pray for the leaders of all nations, that they amplify the voices of people in need. Guide all people entrusted with leadership, to create societies in which everyone can flourish. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Compassionate God, you fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty. Nourish those who lack access to adequate food and nutrition. Bless the work of advocates, community organizers, and food pantries. Encourage others to provide for their neighbors in need. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Healing God, you pour out mercy to all who cry out to you. Surround everyone in need of healing in body, mind, or spirit with your tender presence *especially those we know* Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, you are faithful to the promises you made to our forebears. We give thanks for the ministry of Katharina von Bora Luther and other ancestors who organized, planned, dreamed, encouraged, and reached out as they served you. We give thanks for the bold leadership of female leaders in our own time. Inspire others with their steadfast witness. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The peace of Christ be with you always and also with you.

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray **The Lord's 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,
 and the power, and the glory,
 forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn LBW 39, ELW 267 - Joy to the World

Benediction

May the Creator of the stars bless your Advent waiting,
May the long expected Savior fill you with love,
And may the unexpected Spirit guide your journey,
+now and forever. Amen.

Dismissal Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.