

PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH
ADVENT 4 - RETURN TO THE PROMISE
Reverend John R. Hanson
Sunday, December 19, 2021, 8:00 a.m.

PRELUDE

J. Hanson

INTRODUCTION

Cradle and cross are inextricably connected this Sunday! The last week of Advent returns us to the beginning of the story of John the Baptizer, as Mary, pregnant with Jesus, visits Elizabeth, and John leaps within his mother's womb. Mary's song is one of the highlights of the birth narrative and carries a powerful message of redemption and praise; "My soul magnifies the Lord..., for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."

CALL TO WORSHIP (8:00)

Celebration Singers

THEME AND VERSE (light Advent candles)

Let us gather in the darkness until we see God's light emerge. Let us wait with hope-filled hearts as Christ's image grows within us and shows us life. Let him speak to us and teach us love until we open our hearts to be his home. As we worship in this place, we light the candles of hope, peace, joy, and love.

It is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:10)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION God is good. **All the time.**

HOLY GOSPEL: Luke 1:39-55

Elizabeth, who is pregnant carrying John the Baptizer, and Mary, who is pregnant carrying Jesus, are two women filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. Elizabeth's inspired greeting and Mary's song of praise proclaim a saving God who remembers, scatters, lifts up, and fulfills.

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country,
⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit
⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry,

"Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who

believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁴⁶And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown

strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich

away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION All the time.

God is good!

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

We gather together to worship

in the name of the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Lord's righteousness is a witness against us, let us open our hearts and trust in his mercy. Our repentance is trusting God's mercy in the face of judgment.

Lord, our faithfulness is weak, we do not seek your strength in our relationship with you or each other. We rely on our power and our pride in success. We overlook the lonely and the lowly. Our hearts are too full of confidence in our faithfulness to receive your faithfulness with joy. Forgive us the sins we might see, save us from the sins we refuse to see.

The ever-faithful God with promises of old, comes again and anew. We have been made holy through the offering of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, one time for all people! Our sins are forgiven! Christ was born for this! Through the filling of the Holy Spirit, we leap with joy as our souls proclaim the greatness of the Lord.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit! Amen.

SHARING OF THE PEACE

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, we rejoice in the reality of who you are. We live within the joy of your love for us. Our contentment comes and goes. Our happiness ebbs and flows. Our feelings depend upon our circumstances, our physical health, our brain chemistry, but our joy is deeply rooted in our identity as your beloved children. And we give you thanks. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC

"The First Noel"

Haley, Kathy, Sue

YOUTH MINISTRY

"GIFTS OF CHRISTMAS"

READING

Shepherds

HYMN

"The Little Drummer Boy"

Come, they told me, pa rum pum pum pum.
A new born king to see, pa rum pum pum pum.
Our finest gifts we bring, pa rum pum pum pum.
To lay before the king, pa rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum.
So, to honor him, pa rum pum pum pum, when we come.

Little baby, pa rum pum pum pum.
I am a poor boy too, pa rum pum pum pum.
I have no gift to bring, pa rum pum pum pum, that's fit to give our king,
Pa rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum.
Shall I play for you, pa rum pum pum pum, on my drum.

Mary nodded, pa rum pum pum pum.
The ox and lamb kept time, pa rum pum pum pum.
I played my drum for him, pa rum pum pum pum. I played my best for him,
Pa rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum.
Then he smiled at me, pa rum pum pum pum, me and my drum.

READING The Little Drummer Boy

HYMN “Bright and Glorious Is the Sky” Green # 75

Bright and glorious is the sky, radiant are the heavens high
Where the golden stars are shining, and their rays to earth inclining
Beckon us to heav’n above, beckon us to heav’n above.

Sages from the East afar, when they saw this wondrous star,
Went to the find the king of nations and to offer their oblations
Unto him as Lord and King, unto him as Lord and King.

Him they found in Bethlehem, yet he wore no diadem;
They but saw a maiden lowly with an Infant pure and holy
Resting in her loving arms, resting in her loving arms.

READING The Wise Men

HYMN “Bright and Glorious Is the Sky” Green # 75

Guided by the star, they found him whose praise the ages sound,
We too have a star to guide us which forever will provide us
With the light to find our Lord, with the light to find our Lord.

As a star, God’s holy Word leads us to our King and Lord;
Brightly from its sacred pages shall this light throughout the ages
Shine upon our path of life, shine upon our path of life.

READING Our Gifts to Jesus

SPECIAL MUSIC Zoey

SERMON - *The Advent “waiting” can tempt one to become a passive observer of God’s activity. Instead, the Scriptures call us to be active participants in God’s salvation. You may ask, ‘Who*

am I?’ You are called “blessed!” For the Mighty One has done great things, and holy is his name.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

THE LORD’S PRAYER

BLESSING & PRAYER FOR HOLY COMMUNION

Lord God, we come to your table of grace weighed down by our past. Here we discover the wonder of your love, the abundance that comes from your power, and the joy which can be found in the Good News of Jesus. It is he who comes to save us, every tribe, every nation, and people of every tongue. Amen.

BENEDICTION & SENDING

Never put your faith in worldly status, and never underestimate your heavenly importance. Let your trust in the coming of Christ soar within you like wings of joy.

Go out into the world and serve one another as those who bear Gods Word.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father, through Jesus our Savior, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us this day and evermore.

Amen! We go to love and serve in Jesus’ name!

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Worship, as an action, continues to change.

Use this space to guide your thoughts as the Spirit may lead you.

Use this time to center your distractions in order to help activate your worship.

There’s a temptation contained in this week’s readings to view salvation as God’s work of rescue for which we do nothing but receive. Of course, on one level, we are nothing more than recipients of God’s grace. But the Gospel does not portray God as a superhero who swoops into save us while we just look on in amazement.

In the Micah reading, a shepherd is promised for God’s people. This is God’s work. But that shepherd comes from an insignificant town, which means that the work of this shepherd will require response from the people to whom he comes. In the Hebrews reading, Jesus is revealed as the one who obeys and sacrifices in order to save us, but this is placed in the context of a discourse around covenant and our response to the work of Christ which makes us holy.

Finally, in the Gospel, Mary’s visit to Elizabeth is testimony to the divine initiative in both the birth of John and of Jesus, but both mothers are participants in the process of incarnation, and Mary’s song reveals that, although God is the Savior, the justice that God brings happens as it takes hold of the lives of people.

The challenge this week, then, is to recognize God’s work without becoming mere apathetic spectators of God’s salvation. We are called to be participants with God in God’s saving work, starting with our own lives as we respond in faith and repentance to the sacrifice of Christ. Then, once we have allowed God’s Reign to be conceived in us (like Mary), we become participants in

the process of salvation, seeking through our attitudes and actions to bring salvation and justice to others in whatever way we can.

So, God's Reign comes to us, and then through us to others. Christ sacrifices himself for us, and then we sacrifice ourselves for others. God is born within us, and then we become midwives helping to birth God in others and in our world.

The small acts of repentance toward those we have hurt in our families and communities, and the small acts of turning from apathy to daily justice through learning, participating, voting and teaching, all herald God's Advent among us in practical ways. Add to this the power of hope in God's Spirit to empower us, and in Christ's example to lead us, and we begin to live out the truth that small things really do make a huge difference in the world. Then, as we begin to manifest the values of God's Reign in our own lives, homes, neighborhoods, and communities, we can begin to work alongside others, calling them to embrace the Gospel call for themselves.

This is not about getting people to pray a "sinner's prayer" or sign a commitment card. It's about modeling a whole new way of living – a way that recognizes our connectedness, our interdependence, our responsibility for our own lives and for one another – and challenging those around us, through the fruit of our lives, to join the movement of God's Spirit in our world.

The constant rhythm of Advent, from God coming to us to God coming through us, is an invitation that can be offered to everyone, and as we allow our lives to make the invitation, the signs of Advent are seen among us in our daily lives.

John van de Laar at sacredise.com

*Despite our efforts to keep him out, God intrudes.
The life of Jesus is bracketed by two impossibilities:
a virgin's womb and an empty tomb.
Jesus entered our world through a door marked 'No Entrance'
and left through a door marked 'No Exit.' - - - Peter Larson*

*May you be filled with the wonder of Mary,
the obedience of Joseph,
the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the determination of the magi,
and the peace of the Christ Child.*