

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

*As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather.*

Celebrations / Joys and Concerns

*God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.  
God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.*

Advent Candle Lighting

Peace is the light that sheds understanding.

**Peace is the promise of God.**

Peace is found when God's order and justice are brought to the world.

**We await the birth of the Prince of Peace.**

*(The candle is lit.)*

Let us pray:

**Source of light, shine in our lives and in your world with your everlasting peace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen**

➤ *Christ be our light (verses 1 and 3)*

† Prayer and Words of Hope

God of peace and promise, you are the giver of life, living in us through the power of your Holy Spirit. You are the voice that calls us from our wandering, setting us on a new path. You are the living water that purifies us, baptizing us for service in the world that so badly needs your love. Refresh us in this time of worship and reignite our desire to serve you each and every day.

Merciful God, we bring before you in this time of silent prayer those things in our lives which cause you pain... [Silence]

Straighten out the areas in our lives which hinder people from discerning your way, O God. Smooth the rough edges of our witness so that anything which prevents people hearing your word is cleared away.

Many people walk through shadowed valleys at this time, weighed down by painful, recycled memories. Forgive us when we fail to become involved with the needs of others by pleading seasonal busyness.

Advent God, you call on us to prepare the way for Jesus' birth – make us ready for Jesus to be born anew in our hearts and lives, in our families, our communities, our nation, our world.

Help us, O God, to prepare ourselves faithfully and sincerely to receive the Christ-child. We pray it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem. **Amen**

The apostle Paul prayed that our love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help us determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ we may be pure and blameless. Jesus Christ was sent by God into the world, not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned. Thanks be to God!

➤ *While we are waiting, come*

92 (PCUSA book)

### PWS&D Sharing    **Food Baskets Provide Assurance**

Conflict is on the rise around the world. In places like Syria, Yemen or Ethiopia, these rates are only worsened by climate change and COVID-19. The United Nations estimates that over 88 million people are experiencing hunger due to conflict and instability.

It's been over 10 years since millions of Syrians were forced from their homes due to ongoing civil conflict. Almost six million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries and another 6.7 million are displaced internally in Syria.

Every day is filled with uncertainty.

PWS&D is responding to help alleviate some of these uncertainties by providing 6,000 families with food baskets.

The food baskets provide internally displaced Syrians and their host communities with essential and nutritious foods. Families are able to ensure that their households are fed and food is on the table.

This Advent season help those displaced by conflict strengthen their hearts and bodies on the journey to find peace and security. *(With Canadian Foodgrains Bank, funds contributed to PWS&D for food assistance are multiplied up to four times with the support of the Government of Canada.)* [WeRespond.ca](http://WeRespond.ca)

➤ *Emmanuel, Emmanuel*

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### † Prayer for Understanding

**Holy God, through your scriptures, you have revealed your Word in scripture to your people across many generations. In the fullness of time, you revealed your Living Word in Jesus Christ. Now, by the power of your Holy Spirit, open our minds and hearts to you, so that we find new ways to follow you faithfully in this generation. Amen**

## Scripture

### **Malachi 3: 1-4** [OT 889]

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

### **Luke 1: 68-79** [NT 58]

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

### **Luke 3: 1-6** [NT 60]

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## Message

We have all been living in a state of emergency for more than a year and a half. Initially there was a provincial state of emergency declared allowing health and emergency management officials to use extraordinary powers to support the province's COVID-19 pandemic response. Then, more recently, a provincial state of emergency was declared to mitigate impacts on transportation networks and movement of essential goods and supplies, and to support the provincewide response and recovery from the widespread damage caused by severe flooding and landslides in British Columbia. It has been 20 months of emergency – 20 months of serious and unexpected situations requiring immediate action – 20 months of danger and uncertainty. It has been a long 20 months!

And these situations of danger and disaster have not been the only unexpected and serious problem for us to face. COVID has revealed cracks in many of our institutions and in the fabric of our society. It has highlighted divisiveness and heightened emotions. It has stressed our healthcare system and our school system in unforeseen ways. The floods have caused us to rethink our travel plans – again – and forced us to reckon with the effects of climate change in an up close and personal way which we have been avoiding for some time. The state of emergency is not just the flooding and the loss of roads or farmland, but the restriction on our gas consumption and the limited availability of many products including chicken and beef. The interruption to transportation has far reaching effects. We were told in our community this week that certain items cannot be recycled for the time being because they cannot be transported to the market that normally receives them. The impact of a state of emergency is far reaching indeed. And it is wearing us out.

Most of life is not lived in crisis – which I'd say is a good thing. Not many of us thought we would ever need to sustain the urgency of a state of emergency for any length of time. We are used to, and likely need, the ups and downs in life – crisis and calm – balance. The one thing crisis has going for it is this: in times of crisis everything is cast into stark relief – every detail becomes important and significant. Life itself is on the line – so no word is casual – no action marginal – and God, our relationship with God, is front and centre – breaking news.

During the humdrum times – ordinary times – when things are normal, God can be crowded to the sidelines of our lives, as we become preoccupied with ourselves. In ordinary times religion is made light of and people ask if God really exists – if God is really necessary. In times of emergency people ask where God is – why is God allowing this or that to happen. And – in both ordinary and extraordinary times there is complaining about God – treating worship as a hobby or diversion – something to entertain and distract from either the routine or the crisis. In routine, run-of-the-mill times we manage our personal affairs for our own convenience – disregarding what God might say about them – going about our usual activities as if God were not involved and during a state of emergency we can get so caught up and busy with what is wearing us out – wearing us down – that we just don't have time for God.

Malachi has something to say about this – something to offer. Malachi is writing to create a sense of urgency at a time when the people are unaware that anything is amiss. He wants to wake them up to the importance of God’s presence during the times when things are going well so that they will be ready when a state of emergency descends. He is trying to keep them on their toes – listening for God – waiting in anticipation for God – preparing to respond to God who is here and who is always coming.

The book of Malachi is the final book in the Old Testament – the final word until, some 400 years later a prophet named John cleared his throat to shout out, “*Repent! Prepare the way of the Lord!*” And that definitely ties in with Malachi’s message and explains why it is paired with Luke’s reading for this Sunday.

In terms of history, Malachi was likely a contemporary of Nehemiah – living at a time when Jerusalem was rebuilt after the Israelites returned to Judah following their seventy years as prisoners in Babylon. It was a relatively happy time for the Israelites – crises free, if you will. There was a sense for Israel that their long, national nightmare was over. The wretched Babylonians were no more, having themselves been conquered by the Persians, who had let the Israelites go free to rebuild their shattered homeland. The Israelites were not politically independent yet – living under the rule of the local Persian governor – still, life was better than it had been in a long time.

Malachi’s overarching message is encouraging – *God still loves the people and will send the Messiah one day.* In the meantime, however, the people are told that they had better shape up – they better get ready for God’s messenger. If they don't, the message is clear: *Remember how bad it was when the Babylonians came? It will be worse – much worse!*

Malachi was charged by God to get the people’s attention. He had to return God to the center of their lives. The good news is that if the people could achieve that kind of God-consciousness in their daily lives, God would shine down on them like a glorious sunrise. If the people could come to realize once again that following God’s way is not a restrictive way to live but a liberating one, then they would discover a freedom and a joy they had never before known.

God wants this to happen, and God has promised that it will happen. The Lord **is** coming. The question is, are we prepared? Are we ready to receive the Lord? Open to God preparing us?

God’s part is to send a messenger to announce the good news – to prepare the way. We read of this in Malachi just before the canon of Scripture falls silent for around 400 years. The conclusion of Malachi's message and the beginning of John the Baptist's message is this: *God is gracious and wants to shine down abundant life on us. But we need to be ready.*

We have all been encouraged to have emergency kits on hand – to prepare. Keep important documents handy, have a supply of clean water, some non-perishable food, medications, supplies for pets, warm clothing, a heat or cooking source. When the state of emergency happens, you need to be prepared! Malachi says it and so does John.

John comes from the wilderness – a place of danger and potential disaster not unlike a state of emergency perhaps. He comes crying out for preparation using an image familiar to the people of Israel – reminding them of Isaiah’s words from so long ago and the picture of ancient kings traveling in the Babylonian Empire. In those days when a king would travel to a less-inhabited region, a core group of royal engineers would prepare the road for the king to pass. They would smooth out the road so that the king’s chariot would not get stuck in a rut. They would level out hills and valleys so the journey would not be so treacherous, and the king would have safe passage. The road had to be prepared for the king to come.

Isaiah used these words to inspired hope among the Jewish exiles who were languishing, far from their homeland, in the grandiose city of Babylon. This was a message that promised the Hebrew exiles a return home. Poetically, Isaiah declared that a highway would be opened up across the deserts to their homeland. The valleys would be filled, the hills leveled, the crooked path straightened, and rough sections made smooth. It was the promise of a physical return home.

The messenger tells us to prepare the way for the king. Into the humdrum routine of the people’s lives, John stirs things up – creates a state of emergency just as Malachi had done those centuries before. John announces Jesus as the king who comes to dwell in our hearts, so that is where the preparation is needed. The prophet takes the words of Isaiah and applies them in a personal sense – to the things of the human spirit. He calls upon his hearers to let God straighten out their lives – to repent and return home to God. In this way they can be prepared for the coming of the Messiah – prepared for living in Christ and having Christ live in them.

Today, having experienced the wilderness-level trauma of a global pandemic for nearly two years, many people long for certainty about the road ahead. Some hope for a new life, others ache to return to the way things were, and still others have little energy to look beyond the struggles of the current day – especially now that the new emergency of flooding, mudslides and supply chain catastrophes undermine our confidence and our hope.

Very little is certain about the post-pandemic world, except for the promise represented by John’s proclamation in the wilderness: God enters this time and space in this period of history, so that *“all flesh shall see the salvation of God”*.

John, like Malachi, seeks to create a sense of urgency in us – to wake us up to the state of emergency we are in – to reminds us that even now God continues to break into the world – that God yearns to be present in the centre of our lives.

We are called to a state of emergency – prepare! Deal with things as they really are – the crooked in us needs straightening – the rough needs sanding down – the cringing self needs lifting up – the pride needs leveling.

We are all called to prepare... to be really ready – to feel the urgency of God within. In being ready we are all set to live abundantly in the presence of our Lord – to be released into the

undiminished joy of being. Prepared, we will see the golden glints of the glory of God in many unexpected places and events. Amen

➤ *All earth is waiting*

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#### † Offering and Prayer

We make our offering today as a sign of our commitment to the reign of Christ among us, trusting that our gifts will accomplish more than we might ever imagine, because God will bless them—and us.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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**Mighty and Merciful God, we bring our gifts to you, trusting that your blessing will multiply their effects in the world. Use them and us to prepare the way for Christ to enter lives with his compassion and courage, so that the world will know his peace and trust his name. Amen**

#### 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**

#### Gathering at the Lord's Table

The celebration of communion is always a festival of friends – where we gather around the table with all our hopes and dreams, longing for a glimpse of the holy. It is here where bread is broken, and the cup is shared that we can be most truly ourselves – seeing ourselves and others as children of the living God. Here, that which is earthly becomes divine and that which is human becomes more than have ever been dreamed. Come to the table – you are all welcome. Christ invites us to meet him here.

➤ *Here is bread: here is wine*

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The Lord be with you. ***And also with you.***

Lift up your hearts. ***We lift them to the Lord.***

Let us give thanks to our Creator God.

***It is right to give God thanks and praise.***

Gracious and loving God, we praise and thank you, for you are the creator of all goodness and the source of abundance. In the beginning, your Spirit danced on the waters and brought us life. In your generosity, you created a garden of delights and nourishment – you called us to live with respect in creation and to care for one another.

You brought your people out of slavery into a land of milk and honey – flowing with streams of living water and planted with groves of olive trees.

When we turned away from you – living in greed and violence – you sent us prophets to call us back and remind us to live for a day when no one would be hungry and we would live together in justice and peace.

And so, with every generation before us, with all who will come after us, we lift our voices in joyful praise...

*O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space. All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace. Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise. And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!*

Generous God, we give you thanks for Jesus, who came to live with us... We remember how he called his disciples to follow him and become fishers of all people. He told stories and taught us to pray. We thank you that he loved eating and drinking around tables where strangers became friends and where outcasts were included.

Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, but you raised him from the dead – and like his disciples we meet him again in the breaking of bread as we gather around his table.

We remember and give you thanks, O God, that as he sat at the table with friends – sharing the fruit of the vine and the harvest of the fields – he took bread, blessed it, broke it and shared it, saying:

*Take – eat – this is my body which is for you.*

*Do this to remember me.*

When supper was over, he took a cup of wine and raised it, saying:

*This is God's new covenant, made possible because of my death.*

*Drink this all of you, to remember me.*

As we gather in the promise of Christ, we proclaim the mystery of faith...

*Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again! Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!*

Pour out your grace upon us, O God, and upon the simple gifts of this meal. Send your Spirit on us and on what we do here as we gather at the Lord's Table to eat and drink of the living Word. May we be one in Christ and one with your vision of peace and plenty.

**In Christ, with Christ, through Christ – by the power of the Holy Spirit – all glory is yours, now and forever and so we sing...**

*Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen! Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!*

### Sharing Bread and Wine

The one who was with God in the beginning, is with us in this bread.

The one of whom the prophets spoke now speaks to us in this cup.

The bread of life – the cup of grace – we remember and share with thanksgiving these gifts in which God comes to us so that we may come to God.

*Those in person have received a pre-sealed package of elements. Everyone consumes the elements together in their own space...*

### † Prayer

Holy One, your world waits: in the longing of the persecuted for justice – in the longing of the poor for prosperity – in the longing of the privileged for riches other than wealth – in the longing of each heart for a better life and in expectant song of the church: *Come, O Come Emmanuel.*

God of sweet bread – God of tart juice and wine – we give thanks that you have fed us again. So much more is received than just what we swallow. So much more is absorbed than just what we taste. We give thanks for each person present with us today. Bind our hearts by the receiving of this sacrament. Bind us firmly with all who do this in remembrance of you. Bind us always in your Spirit as we sing together...

➤ *Our Father in heaven (The Lord's Prayer – no repeats) 469*

### Blessing

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we go into the world to fulfil our calling as the people of God – the body of Christ. Go in peace. Love and care for one another. May God richly bless you as we wait with anticipation for the day of the Lord's coming. May the love of Christ make the rough places smooth, and the light of the Holy Spirit guide you in your daily walk now and always.

➤ *Go now in peace (round) 622*