

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. We commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

Advent Candle Lighting

Love is a gift of God.

Love burns in our hearts.

Love is warmth in a world that is often bitter and cold.

In Jesus Christ, we receive God's gift of love.

(The candle is lit.)

Let us pray: **Source of light, shine in our lives and in your world with your unending love. Through Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen**

➤ *Christ be our light (verses 1 and 5)*

† Prayer / Words of Hope

O God, our Saviour, with Mary, our spirits rejoice in you this day. Your mercy is known from generation to generation. And so, we praise and magnify your holy name with hearts full of gratitude, trusting you will do great things once again through Christ our Lord, born for us, born to be with us.

Holy One, we celebrate the gift of a saviour yet as we sing and celebrate, we are aware of our sin and so we pray...

...before the whole company of heaven, and in the presence of these sisters and brothers in Christ, I confess that I have sinned by my own fault, in thought, word, and deed. I pray that God Almighty might have mercy on me, forgive me all my sins, and bring me to everlasting life.

May Almighty God have mercy on you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins and give you time to amend your life. Amen

Before the whole company of heaven, and in the presence of these sisters and brothers in Christ, I confess that I have sinned by my own fault, in thought, word, and deed. I pray that God Almighty might have mercy on me, forgive me all my sins, and bring me to everlasting life.

May Almighty God have mercy on you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins and give you time to amend your life. **Amen**

➤ *Love has come*

110 (PCUSA book)

PWS&D Sharing **An Education for Robina**

Robina lives with her mother, father and five siblings in a make-shift house in Afghanistan. This past year, Robina was the only member of her family in school – but it wasn't just because of COVID-19.

Prior to the Taliban takeover of the country, only 38 percent of children in Afghanistan attended school. Poverty is one of the leading causes; families with many children often can't afford uniforms and school supplies for each child.

Girls are affected unequally because of a cultural belief that there is little value for education for girls. Only one in five students in Afghan schools are female, and only about one in 10 adult women are literate. And the current political situation in Afghanistan means many more children are faced with uncertainty about their futures, particularly girls.

PWS&D is passionate about ensuring children have access to quality education. Starting at the community level, PWS&D's local partner in Afghanistan helps parents and religious leaders understand girls' rights – most importantly, the right to education.

This Advent season help make sure children like Robina have access to a quality education so that they can build bright and sustainable futures.

➤ *Emmanuel, Emmanuel*

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† Prayer for Understanding

Open our ears, O God, to hear your voice speaking to us through the scriptures. Open our hearts to recognize your presence with us and know your direction for us. May we say with Mary, *"Let it be with me according to your Word."* Amen

Scripture **Micah 5: 2-5a** [OT 865]

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

Therefore, he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

Hebrews 10: 5-10 [NT 224]

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, See, God, I have come to do your will, O God (in the scroll of the book it is written of me)."

When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “See, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Luke 1: 39-55 [NT 57]

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

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

Message

This summer I took a course called “Mary for Protestants” in which we explored the role of Mary in the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions. The assertion of the instructors – one Anglican and one Evangelical Protestant – was/is that understanding Mary – her story, her part in the incarnation of the divine, her contribution to our redemption, and her potential to sustain and enrich our faith – ought not be dismissed out of hand. One of the exercises during the course was to spend some time exploring and discussing icons of Mary. Ancient statues, paintings etc. that usually depict Mary with some sort of halo, holding the infant Jesus. There is much to learn about beliefs and doctrines through this sort of study.

A more recent artwork that we also reflected upon is this piece entitled “Mary Consoles Eve” in which Sister Grace Remington from Our Lady of Mississippi Abbey depicts a very pregnant Mary with Eve, the serpent wrapped around Eve’s ankles. Eve’s hand is on Mary’s belly and Mary is holding her hand with her own,



the other cradling Eve's face, consoling her – both are looking down at the womb where the Saviour grows.

Another member of the abbey, Sr Columba Guare, penned this poem to accompany the icon. It is Mary speaking to Eve...

***O Eve!¹
My mother, my daughter, life-giving Eve,
Do not be ashamed, do not grieve.
The former things have passed away,
Our God has brought us to a New Day.
See, I am with Child,
Through whom all will be reconciled.
O Eve! My sister, my friend,
We will rejoice together
Forever
Life without end.***

There is some controversy about this drawing to be sure. Some rail against it for portraying the women as white, which they certainly were not. Some wonder where Adam is – he too sinned in the garden and is complicit in the fall of humanity that so often is dropped in Eve's lap. Some suggest this icon perpetuates the damaging and oppressive narrative fueled by the desire to keep the patriarchy safely in place.

Others love it. They see valuable symbolism in the fruit on the figgy arbour, in the fruit that Eve is holding in her hand, and in the fruit that Mary holds in her womb. They note the flowing water-like nature of Mary's headdress and the hair for clothing that covers Eve. They see important messages in the snake coiled about Eve's leg and the snake's head being crushed beneath Mary's foot. Those who love the picture and celebrate the imagery it contains see Mary depicted as a messenger, and the message is all about who is in her belly.

I'm still contemplating what I think of the drawing. It is interesting to think of this connection between Mary and Eve. Several early church theologians saw Mary as the antithesis of Eve and the antidote to Eve's sin. Even though Adam and Eve both ate the forbidden fruit and both sinned, these theologians overemphasised Eve's doubt, disobedience, and pride as being instrumental in bringing sin into the world. Conversely, they highlighted Mary's faith, obedience, and humility as being instrumental in bringing salvation into the world. But Mary is more than a "new Eve." She is her own person with her own story to tell.

I think Mary is central to the story of the incarnation and the incarnation of the divine – the embodiment of God in Jesus – God's willingness to get involved in the flesh and blood of human life is key to our faith. One of the professors in our course, Jason Byassee wrote, "the Christian

¹ Sr Columba Guare © 2005, Sisters of the Mississippi Abbey

God is enwombed. To say otherwise is to introduce some sort of split in the Son himself, to suggest that the man Jesus is born of Mary and the divinity is not (perhaps the divinity is added later or not at all). To call Mary *theotokos* (God-bearer) is to safeguard the fleshiness of God, and so the entire saving work of God in Christ.”²

It is an evocative piece – memorable. There is much to look at – to appreciate or question. The expressions. The style. The love. The serpent. The humanity. Jesus at the center. There’s something very special about it.



Another artist, Scott Erickson, was so captivated that he did his own work inspired by the original. He says that what he loves most is the look they have for each other – deeply connected on so many levels. He sees Eve experiencing hope and grace from a brokenness she never thought she’d see an end to. And in her face, he also perceives the look of a knowing mom bestowing compassion on a new mom-to-be, Mary.

His version of the icon focuses on Mary taking Eve’s hand and placing it on her belly to let her feel the restoring hope that is growing in her womb – a movement of sobering solidarity – the great cloud of witnesses of broken-hearted moms who’ve lost their children too early.

He too is drawn to the significance of incarnation – that Immanuel means “God with Us” – and that this divine gift comes to us through one of us, into the womb of a blessed and humble teenage woman. There is something very special about this indeed.

But what does Mary consoling Eve have to do with our text from Luke today and how does it connect with our Advent waiting for the coming Christ?



I did find an image of the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, though it is certainly not as artistic or inspiring as the images of Mary and Eve. Here Elizabeth’s head is facing heavenward – she is the focus of the first part of our reading today. Mary goes to Elizabeth but right away the point of view shifts to Elizabeth who, along with in-utero-baby-John, has a positive visceral physical reaction to the sound of Mary’s voice. Her response is an expression of the presence of the Holy Spirit, who fills her and causes her to cry out. She recognizes Mary’s state as “blessed” – that she has already been blessed as part of the process of saying yes to God when the angel Gabriel visited. Like prophetic voices before her, she is an agent of God expressing what is already true.

If Mary came to Elizabeth with any doubts or fears about what she has just said yes to, hopefully these words from God through Elizabeth, along with seeing that what Gabriel said God did for Elizabeth is true (Elizabeth being visibly pregnant in her old age) quelled them.

² [What about Mary? Protestants and Marian devotion](http://christiancentury.org/article/2004-12/what-about-mary) christiancentury.org/article/2004-12/what-about-mary by Jason Byassee

Elizabeth is in awe that the blessing of God continues to be showered upon her. For Elizabeth, becoming pregnant with John was already the best blessing she thought she could receive and now she's realizing that there are even greater things to come from God's hand for her and for the whole world.

As Elizabeth speaks her humbled, awe-filled, gratitude, *"And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord,"* we can see her holding her own pregnant womb, and similarly reaching out to Mary. It is a consolation of a different kind but is not altogether different than what Mary is depicted as giving to Eve in the first drawing.

And in this, we see that Elizabeth's blessing, for herself, for Mary, and for anyone – even Eve – who hears the promise of God and believes it will be fulfilled, who obeys with fear and trembling coupled with faith, is blessed. Yes, even Eve, and every one of us who succumb all too often to the temptations of sin, can be blessed in the turn to faith and waiting on the fulfillment of the Lord. This is the encouragement we can offer to one another as we seek to join Mary and Elizabeth in saying "yes" to God and living by faith.

God calls us into the work of redeeming the world. People broke the world, but God is using people to redeem it, too. *My soul magnifies the Lord!* Mary sings. *He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly!*

This time of waiting in Advent is not about how we were so terribly good and amazing, and so holy, and fought sin so profoundly and well, that God just *had* to come for us. Advent is not a story of good people winning over a skeptical, distant Deity. Advent is the story of people who *would not let go of their sin, and God came for us anyway* – came in the person of Jesus.

Advent is Elizabeth, receiving blessings with awe and thanksgiving. Advent is Eve, holding her sin and longing for new life. Advent is Mary, comforting Eve, inspiring Elizabeth, and crying out for divine justice that redeems and changes everything. May it be so.

➤ *My soul gives glory to my God*

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† Offering and Prayer

We make our offering this day with hearts full of love, filled with the hope and joy this season brings. Give knowing God's love will spread far and wide through what we offer in Jesus' name.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow 306*

God of Life and Love, receive our gifts this day as tokens of our love for you and signs of our willingness to share that love in the world around us. Bless our lives as well as our gifts, so that we may be a blessing to others for the sake of the Christ Child, our Saviour and our friend. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Let us pray to our God, **giving thanks in silence...**

Our souls praise you, O God, and our spirits rejoice in you, our salvation, for as you did unto Mary, you have done unto us – you have been mindful of us, and of our humble state. You have been merciful to us and have satisfied our hungering hearts. We declare, O God, the greatness of your name. We proclaim your might, we affirm your power, we herald your dominion, and we tell out the glory of your word!

Help us O God to rely upon your promises and to put our trust in you always. Grant us wisdom and discernment and a faithful keeping of Christmas. May your love and your hope – the love and the hope that is made flesh in deeds of caring and sharing – may that love, and that hope be in us.

Grant, O God, to those who gather for celebrations and work holidays, safe travel and a time of joy and peace with their families and friends...

Grant also that those who are alone may be visited and cheered by their neighbours and by us.

Grant, O God, to those who are dwelling in the darkness of want, of need, or of despair – a new light at this time...

Keep us aware of those who cannot sing or rejoice during this season and so direct us that we might be ones that bring a new song to their hearts....

Grant, O God, the requests of our hearts at this time – our prayers for our family, our community, and our world as we offer them in silence...

Giver of the greatest gift – move in our hearts and make us people worthy of the name of Jesus. Raise up that which has been brought low and bring down that which has been lifted up. Prepare in us and through us the way of your Son Jesus Christ – we ask it in his name using the prayer he encouraged us to pray with confidence... ***...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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

➤ ***Hark the glad sound***

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Blessing

Into the broken world as we make our weary way, just when the night becomes it's darkest and we cannot see our path, just then is when the angels rush in... bringing a light of hope and joy, bringing a light of peace and love, bringing into our darkness, the light of Christ. May the love of God bless you, the grace of Jesus fill you, and the enthusiasm of the Spirit be born within you again as we await with joy the day of the Lord's coming.

➤ ***Go now in peace (round)***

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