

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also know that this is the unceded territory of the Lkwungen and WSÁNEĆ people. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting the injustice in our history. We ask that the God of love and justice lead us along the path of reconciliation, bringing accountability and healing. May we be inspired to forge new relationships of respect and solidarity.

PWS&D Message ***Scholarship Provides Hope for the Future***

Despite facing challenges during her childhood, 16-year-old Emmice was doing exceptionally well in school in Malawi.

Raising Emmice alone, her mother found it difficult to find jobs with only a grade eight education. Leaving Emmice with her grandmother, Emmice's mother moved to South Africa in search of employment to help her support her family. But, after a xenophobic attack on her small business, she returned to her family in Malawi empty-handed.

At this time, Emmice was attending her first year at Neno Girls Secondary School, where PWS&D funds bursaries for marginalized students who might be at risk of dropping out without support.

Due to financial troubles, Emmice's mom decided to withdraw Emmice from school. But knowing how successful Emmice's studies had been, the school selected her to receive a bursary, allowing her to continue attending.

Today Emmice is working to earn her high school diploma, which will provide her with more opportunities for the future.

Thank you for faithfully responding to Christ's call to support those in need this Advent season. In countries around the world, PWS&D is helping children access opportunities to create brighter futures.

Gabriel's Secret Mission #1: Heaven, 15 months before the birth of Christ

➤ ***Hope is a star (verse 1)***

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Call to Worship / Advent Candles

God's people wanted the saviour that God promised to come.

They waited in hope.

The prophets said someone would prepare the way.

They waited in hope.

We wait for Jesus to come again among us.

We wait and watch in hope.

(Light the candle of Hope)

Gathering Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

God of Hope, help us as we listen to the story of Zechariah. Remind us how much you love and care for us. Help us to offer your hope to others. We pray together as Jesus taught... ***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, forever. Amen***

Meet Zechariah

Zechariah's name means "God remembers." Moses' brother Aaron was his ancestor. Like all the male direct descendants of Aaron, Zechariah was a priest who served in the temple in Jerusalem, the biggest and most important place of worship for Jewish people. There were so many priests that they were divided into 24 groups. Every group served for two weeks each year and at Jewish festivals. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were old and had not been able to have children. This was challenging for both of them. Nonetheless, they faithfully followed God's commandments. They waited for the Messiah, promised by the prophets for centuries, to come and save them.

➤ ***Your word, O God, awoke the uncreated*** **508**

Prayer for Understanding

God of hope and healing, we turn to your Word to hear your will and wisdom for our times. Open our hearts and minds by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit so that we might hear what you are saying to the church through Christ, your Living Word. Amen

Scripture: **Luke 1: 5-25** [NT 56]

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

Once when he was serving as priest before God during his section's turn of duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he returned to his home.

After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me in this time, when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

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

➤ *People in darkness*

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Questions / Reflection

1. Zechariah offered incense to God. Have you ever offered something special to God? What was it? How did you feel during that experience?
2. Zechariah and Elizabeth really wanted a baby but were old and could not have children. Have you ever hoped or waited for something? What was that experience like for you?
3. Has God ever answered one of your prayers? What was that experience like for you?

Activity – ***constructing a prayer chain***

Think of people or groups in our community who need hope right now. Write their names on slips of paper and loop them through each other, taping the ends of each slip together to create a paper prayer chain. We will put the chain up in the sanctuary and add to it up until Christmas, remembering to pray for the people named. (If you are at home – display your chain and give thanks for the hope God promises.)

Offering and Prayer ***Praise God from whom all blessings flow*** 306

This Sunday we celebrate the Advent of Hope, coming to us in Jesus Christ. Think of your gifts as seeds of that hope which we can plant in the world God loves for Christ's sake.

God, our hope and our help, receive our gifts as seeds of gratitude for your gift to us in Christ Jesus. Bless these seeds with growth so that hope will sprout in people who struggle with despair, and places trying to rebuild after devastating loss. Be their hope and their help, through Christ our Lord. Amen

Closing Prayer

God of hope, thank you for the story of Zechariah. Help us to listen to you and trust you like he did. Remind us of how much you love and care for us. Give us the opportunity to share your hope with others this week. Amen

Blessing

Go in hope and keep awake! Watch for signs of God at work around and within you. Look for opportunities to serve others in Jesus' name. And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

¹Service idea from [Journey to Christmas Advent Devotional](#) (PCC) and [Conversations with Gabriella](#) by Patricia Souder ([skitguys.com](#))