

Welcome / Announcements / 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 lament current and historic injustices on this land. We live here not knowing the full story of the land and its people but seeking to learn more, and, by the grace of God, trying to walk a more hopeful and helpful path.

Call to Worship / Advent Candles

Voice 1: The prophets call, and an apostle writes that peace comes from God.

Voice 2: *“For a child has been born for us...and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ...and there shall be endless peace.”* (Isaiah 9) *“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4)

Voice 1: The world, our relationships and our lives are all too often torn by conflict and injustice. Advent calls us to pray and work for peace – shalom – in the world God loves and to which Christ came. But God's shalom is not simply the absence of conflict. Shalom is the peace that comes when we live life in the balance, loving God and one another.

Voice 2: Holy are you, Source of all new life among us.

All: Jesus Christ comes as the Prince of Peace.

Voice 2: We join with all creation and lift our hearts in joyful praise.

All: We light this candle to shine for peace. (light the candle of peace)

□ *Hope is a star (verse 2)*

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PWS&D Message ~ ***“This assistance has provided me relief”***

In Pakistan, Hafiza Bibi, a single mother of four, suffered the loss of her husband and daughter and saw her home crumble before her eyes during a devastating monsoon season.

Hafiza's husband had worked as a farmer labourer, while Hafiza stayed at home, caring for her four children. *“Our relatives would sometimes help us by giving wheat or money as charity. However, after the floods, everyone suffered badly, and no one we know was able to help,”* she explains.

¹ The inspiration and much of the content for the Advent services is from “Sing a New Song: An Advent Devotional” from the PCC.

Hafiza and her family were selected to participate in a food assistance project supported by PWS&D through our local partner Community World Service Asia, with support from Canadian Foodgrains Bank. *“I bought essential food items such as wheat flour, rice, sugar, tea, milk and vegetables. This assistance has provided me with some relief and allowed me to put food on the table for my children,”* she shares, with peace of mind.

This Advent season, thank you for faithfully responding to Christ’s call to provide comfort by ensuring families have the necessary resources to sustain their lives.

† Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Peace is your gracious and cherished gift, O God. We give thanks for the Advent promise of peace, revealed in the coming of Jesus. We give thanks for the opportunity to receive peace and to share peace in this community of faith.

Peace is your challenging gift, O God. We give thanks for the ways in which we can share peace, in our neighbourhoods, our nation and beyond.

Give us wisdom, O God, to take the time to listen to your word for us. Give us strength to identify the idols that claim our allegiance and courage to destroy them. Give us the nerve to face temptations, O God, relying on your promise of peace.

We rejoice that, in Christ, we have the hope of peace, which encompasses heaven and earth, time and eternity. **Amen**

Peace is flowing like a river. Peace that comes through careful reflection. Peace of well-chosen words and action – the peace of God which refreshes body, mind, and spirit. Receive God’s peace and share it with one another. The peace of Christ be with you all.

□ *There’s a voice in the wilderness crying* 128

† Prayer for Understanding (from Psalm 62)

Oh God, for you alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from you. You alone are my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On you, Oh God, rests my deliverance and my honour, my mighty rock, my refuge. Loving God, we trust you and call on others to trust you, pouring out our hearts before you, for you are a refuge for us. Guide us with your wisdom today and every day. Amen

Scripture **Isaiah 40: 1-11** [OT 667]

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

□ *Prepare the way of the Lord*

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2 Peter 3: 8-15a [NT 238]

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?

But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

Luke 1: 67-79 [NT 58]

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:
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.

A Message with Questions to Ponder in Silence...

Prepare for what's coming – get organized – get ready! But be at peace about it – calm. You have been waiting a long time and now it is time to prepare... that's how I read the opening verses of our passage from Isaiah.

Then in Second Peter we hear about patience – a reminder that God's experience and understanding of time is not the same as ours. God will come when God is ready. We are to wait – not passively, but at peace and as those assured of salvation.

How do you feel about waiting? Is it something comfortable or disconcerting?

What's one thing you've waited a long time for? What makes the waiting difficult?

Wait – prepare – be patient – be ready – be at peace...

And then there is the story of Zechariah in Luke's gospel. We come in at the end of the story in our reading today so let me recap what has happened up to this point...

Zechariah was a priest in the temple of Jerusalem. There were many priests from Aaron's lineage who served in the temple – so many that they were divided into shifts or sections. When each section was on duty, one of the priests was chosen, by drawing lots, to enter the Holy of Holies of the temple. This inner sanctuary was a sacred place where very few human beings ever entered. It was understood to be God's dwelling place, and it was considered so holy that it was dangerous! Perhaps,

when it was Zechariah's turn, he had forgotten just how holy God is, how life-changing an encounter with God can be, and how courageous a person must be to seek such an encounter in the house of worship.

Holy is perhaps the most definitive expression of God. God is the ultimate mystery – awe-inspiring and fascinating – overwhelming and captivating. God's holiness is beyond human imagining. There is such potency to God's name and character that when someone encounters this formidable holiness, a lack of words is often one of the consequences.

How many of us think twice about the risk we are taking when we go to church on a Sunday morning, and how seriously do we consider the possibility that we might just encounter God in God's holy house?

Zechariah was married to a woman named Elizabeth. Both were elderly and had never had children. As Zechariah served in the temple, the angel Gabriel visited him to tell him that Elizabeth would have a child. We often hope to encounter God when we worship, but this was beyond the scope of possibility! He had every reason not to believe this – it was biologically impossible to conceive and bear a child at their age, and all the waiting and prayers over the years seemed to lead only to disappointment. Who could blame him for not believing?

When Zechariah doubted Gabriel, he lost the ability to speak. He was gifted an opportunity for silence and waiting, though he may not have seen it as a gift!

Do you enjoy silence? Does it have a positive or negative connotation?

Waiting and silence are things most of us don't like and even avoid. That is especially true when we are waiting for an answer, a resolution, a diagnosis. It is even true when we are waiting for an answer to prayer. We don't like not knowing. We don't like wondering when or if our prayer will be answered. Waiting reminds us that we are not in control. Waiting doesn't come naturally to most of us, even though we teach our children the necessity of it and train our pets to get good at it. We love the exciting lights and merriment of Christmas but struggle to sit in the 'not yet' of Advent. We like to be busy, and sometimes we have to intentionally create a space of silence or waiting as a spiritual discipline because a time of silence is often a necessary part of the process for a new thing to happen.

Imagine the charades of Zechariah trying to explain what happened in the temple, the confusion and concern from his community, the bewilderment of finding out his aged wife was pregnant, and the connections he made to the stories of Sarah and Abraham, Rachel and Jacob, Hannah and Elkanah!

Put yourself in Zechariah's place. What do you think he pondered and experienced during those ten months of silence?

I wonder if Zechariah valued his time of silence or longed for the chance to talk? Did he learn anything about himself or the world or God during those silent months? Zechariah's doubt results in a ten-month verbal "time out". His imposed silence reminds us of the previous 400 hundred years of silence experienced by God's people when there were no prophets in Israel. The return of Zechariah's voice foreshadows the return of a prophet – his son, John the Baptist. John's prophetic preaching ministry in the wilderness will prepare the way for the coming of Jesus – the Word of God made flesh – the Promised Messiah – the Fulfillment of Covenant.

As soon as the angel Gabriel's prophecy that Zechariah had doubted was fulfilled, he was given voice again and the first thing he did was sing. His tune had changed from disbelief to thanksgiving for God's faithfulness. His song praised and blessed God. He rejoiced that we are free to worship God and live in holiness with whole lives. He professed his hope that we can walk in the way of peace. God was making good on promises made long ago in God's redeeming love and mercy to save us.

Zechariah sings. Full of wild hope, he sings. Knowing the state of the world, he intones a song of blessing. The words of Zechariah from Luke's gospel are a song – a eulogy – often called the *Benedictus* – Latin for *blessed* – the first word he utters. It is a burst of praise celebrating God's mighty acts on behalf of Israel. He emphasizes redemption as a social and political act – echoing Exodus imagery and the vision of a righteous king. Zechariah's song is a proclamation of *God's faithfulness – God's salvation – God's peace*.

Like a melody in a musical overture, Zechariah's prophecy hints at things to come, while reflecting refrains from long before. It is rife with allusions to Hebrew Bible passages that accentuate the promises and prophecies of Israel coming to fulfillment in Jesus, and that John is the prophet who paves the way. These verses are similar to psalms of praise for God's deliverance of Israel. God has raised up "a mighty saviour" for Israel – literally "a horn of salvation." This saviour is the fulfillment of prophecies and of God's merciful covenant that Israel would be saved from her enemies.

The Song of Zechariah heralds the dawning of the light of Jesus on all who sit in darkness. Once rendered mute on account of his doubt, the father of John is now the prophet who proclaims the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. His is a song of Advent, as we wait for the light that has already come and is still yet to come.

Together with other songs in Luke, Zechariah's contribution offers a symphony of praise to the God who is – has been – and always will be – working among God's

people. The prophecy previews several claims of this gospel: *God remains faithful to God's promises – God's way is salvation – God's path is peace.*

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah's song begins with words of praise from the psalms. It continues by pointing backward to God's long-established covenant with God's people. This is no distant divine being – content to set the world in motion and then to leave it alone – this is the Holy One who comes *to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death* – the God who has raised up a saviour for us. The promise given long ago is the same as the promise given today: God is active among us – here and now.

What's one promise you've seen fulfilled that you want to thank God for today?

Zechariah's song is very much our song. We see the faint glimmer on the horizon, and await the full, dazzling spectacle of God's incarnation. We find ourselves now in-between – standing in that moment of the already and the not-yet. The light has dawned but doesn't seem yet to have reached the deepest darkness inside and around us.

To live the life of a disciple of Christ is to live always in a kind of Advent time, knowing that the light has come and awaiting the light that has yet to shine in its fullest measure. Advent time is anticipatory time – yet it is also frustrating – sometimes discouraging. The dawning of the light must sustain us as we continue – in our waiting – and in our living. Sometimes the wait for the full light of Jesus in the world seems long.

We may – with Zechariah – doubt that such a thing is possible. We may – with Zechariah – lose our voice – remaining silent in uncertainty. But we may also – with Zechariah – burst out in song – praising God for the dawn – the first shimmering of promises in whose light we already bask, as we wait for its full radiance. **Amen**

□ *All earth is waiting*

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Offering and Prayer

This Sunday in Advent celebrates God's gift of peace. When we look around the world, we see so many places where peace is missing – in neighborhoods and nations. But because we know the gift of God's peace, we can trust that our gifts will help restore true peace to souls and situations by the power of the Spirit.

□ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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God of promise, we offer our gifts in Jesus' name, for we know peace through his forgiveness and faithfulness. Bless our gifts and our lives. Help us share the peace you offer with lives that touch ours throughout the world you love. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

God in whom we live and move and have our being – as we gather our thoughts in prayer, we are aware of so many challenges – in our own lives, in the lives of those we care about, and in the world around us. We wonder how you will reveal yourself in response to so many different needs. We trust that your heart is moved by the pain and potential in each precious life for you never give up on situations which we find overwhelming... *God of healing, bring peace to the world you love.*

We pray for those who are in the headlines this week, for situations that concern us deeply, and for all who cry out to you in the face of overwhelming odds... Draw near to them with courage and wisdom.

We pray for those who are suffering in quiet corners of our community – remembering those who are ill – those who are bereaved – those who struggle with poverty or unemployment – and all who face barriers through discrimination or disability... Draw near to them with compassion and support. *God of healing, bring peace to the world you love.*

We pray for those who are waiting for something significant – a birth or a death – for diagnosis or treatment – for important news or a new opportunity... Draw near to them in peace and faithfulness.

We pray for those who struggle with their faith and those who have given up on you because of actions taken in your name that betrayed your love... Draw them back to you in this season of wonder and love. *God of healing, bring peace to the world you love.*

We pray for our church and for each other. May our life together offer the healing peace of Christ in our community and in our homes. Open our hearts to new possibilities for ministry as we pray together in Jesus' name ... ***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***

Holy One of all souls born into time, grant us quietness of heart while we remember, and in our remembering, give us eyes to see the work of the Spirit. We live and labour, each in our own way to do your will. We see the slender thread on which life depends. We have seen time split open by the splendor of things eternal. Help us in our remembering to be strong in hope through Jesus Christ our Lord. May we go in peace this day and may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of Jesus. Amen

□ *We will go out with joy*