

Worship at home
December 6, 2020

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT: Peace



<https://www.missiondoctors.org/2018/12/08/second-sunday-of-advent-2/>

If you are using this liturgy at home and haven't already done so, you may wish to light a candle to symbolize the hope Jesus' birth and life brings to the world. Feel free to use battery-operated candles if more appropriate.

Lighting the Advent Candles:

In this season of Advent, we celebrate God's peace.

Jesus Christ, born the Prince of Peace, calls our community to justice and leads us in the way of peace.

We call one another to honesty and humility
and respond to each other with abundant grace and forgiveness.

Our community values relationships.
We live in harmony with one another even when we disagree,
and strive to glorify God in everything we do.

Our community longs for unity.
We work together with other churches and organizations,
and live out God's reconciling love for all the world to see.

Together, we are a sign of God's peace in the world.
The candle of peace is lit.

God of all people and all nations,
you break through the cynicism of our world
and offer a vision of the lion and lamb lying down together.
Open our eyes to see the signs of your coming kingdom
and inspire us to participate in all you are doing in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Hymn #115 “Hail to the Lord’s Anointed”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWDVkOOo4uk>

The Word of God read and interpreted:

READ LUKE 1:26-38

1. The word “perplexed” which Luke used in today’s reading comes from a very specific verb that refers to intensely switching between one’s inner thoughts – reason, logic, cognition – and one’s emotions. Like a can of paint in the mixer being turned upside down then upside right, the soul that is perplexed is the soul that is agitated.

Upon first hearing Gabriel’s greeting, Mary was perplexed. That greeting gave rise to a maelstrom of emotions and thoughts that left her soul agitated. In this stranger’s greeting she detected something holy, something hopeful, something joyful; and yet, who was he to say such words? Who was Mary to receive such a greeting? Was he a friend or did he present a threat? Was he to be trusted or was he a charlatan?

Mary was perplexed.

Luke has crafted the beginning of his gospel in such a way that he tells two parallel stories: the prelude to and the birth of John the Baptist, and the prelude to and birth of Jesus. And both stories are similar. In each Gabriel announces a miraculous birth. In the first to the father, in the second to the mother. Where the stories differ, is in the respective responses to Gabriel’s announcement. Zechariah’s requested knowledge. He wanted signs. He wanted logical proof. As faithful and as righteous as he was, when he actually encountered the power of the Most High in a way that would change his life, he couldn’t yield. He couldn’t bring himself to believe.

In contrast, although Mary didn’t understand Gabriel’s message, she was willing to rest in the mystery of it, and she wondered how God will fulfill it.

She pondered the perplexity.

2. There is much in Gabriel’s message which might leave us also perplexed. Setting aside the biological hurdles – which we learn are hurdles only for humans, with God nothing will be impossible! the child to be born of Mary by the Holy Spirit is to be the Son of the Most High and heir of the ancient king, David. Once enthroned on his ancestral throne, his kingdom will have no end. It’s a message that can evoke feelings of hope. Hope for order and peace. Hope for a joyful existence shaped by the rule of a

King who has been from the beginning and will be for all time. Someone who is stable and gracious. Someone who knows the score. The Alpha and the Omega. It can evoke feelings of curiosity, maybe of inspiration. At the same time, one might wonder how any of this can be.

And, maybe more to the point, how can the renewal of an ancient near eastern monarchy affect me? How can such knowledge help me navigate the joys and stresses of my daily living?

I wonder this almost every day. When I'm trying to prepare supper, and I'm thinking about what I didn't get done throughout the day; and I'm thinking about what I need to do tomorrow; and there're multiple conversations happening in different parts of the house; and there's a time constraint because we still need to do baths, and tidy up, and get to bed on time; and my mind is full of disconnected thoughts and emotions all piling up ... how can my knowledge that the throne of David has been restored to his descendent, help me navigate the evening routine so that what is said and done in that moment testifies to the presence of a kingdom of eternal hope, peace, joy, and love?

3. We ought to always remember that God's Word to us is not a bulleted list of do's and don'ts. Yes, there are laws and moral codes. But it is also an unfurling story. A story of a relationship. We learn to hear God's Word by reading the story and not simply with the purpose of getting what we need and getting out, but resting in the mystery and pondering the perplexities.

Upon hearing the news of the renewal of an ancient kingdom, one might begin by asking about the nature of this kingdom. Before wondering about how it affects my life, we can wonder if it is worth our while.

Luke was careful to tell us at the very beginning that these events took place during the reign of King Herod of Judea. A reign that brought economic prosperity to a few and oppression to many. Peace was enforced by military power. It was a reign of greed and pride and fear.

In contrast to Herod's kingdoms in all ages, we learn from the story, and particularly from Mary and Zechariah's songs (with which we'll engage more fully in the coming weeks) that the kingdom of David's heir is one in which the lowly are lifted up; the hungry are filled with good things; the king seeks the wholeness, healing, and

security of his citizens; it is a kingdom in which the king will give light to those who sit in the darkness, mediate forgiveness of sin, and guide our feet into the way of peace.

All these things are elements of God's promises from of old and now, in this child that is to be born of Mary, God will prove himself trustworthy. Despite circumstances that try to prove otherwise, in Jesus we learn that His word is never broken. By the tender mercy of God, in Jesus the dawn from on high will break upon us.

That's a kingdom I want to be part of.

That's a kingdom whose laws – if I'm willing to obey them – will help me navigate supper time in a way that brings peace into my small corner of the earth.

And the good news we celebrate this season is that this kingdom has come. Yes, the kingdoms of the Herods continue; yet Jesus has been born. Jesus has been crucified. Jesus has been resurrected. And Jesus is now enthroned in the heavenly temple. By the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the blessings of his reign are available to anyone who permits the "Power of the Most High to overshadow you." Whether you were born in the first century Galilee, or are living in the 21st century Canada.

4. In response to Gabriel's message, Mary exhibited *Sacred Curiosity*. It was hard to grasp the significance of what the angel was saying. Nevertheless, Mary trusted. She pondered, she made space for God. And she obeyed.

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord;

let it be with me according to your word."

During this Advent season, we can prepare for the Lord in the privacy of our homes, our hearts, and our minds by following Mary's example: by admitting to and pondering the perplexities of the presence of the King, humbly accepting the mystery, and by yielding to the Power of the Most High – listening for his message in the written words of scripture, living in obedience, awakening to his grace, and responding in thanksgiving.

Make you straight what long was crooked;
 make the rougher places plain;
 let your hearts be true and humble,
 as befits God's holy reign,
 for the glory of the Lord
 now o'er earth is shed abroad,
 and all flesh shall see the token

that God's word is never broken.

Hymn #113 "Comfort, comfort you my people"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=119C58F3dnQ>

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:¹

God of Wisdom and Patience,

In this season of Advent, we wait for your gifts of hope and peace
to claim the world once more.

We wait on you in prayer, knowing you hear us even before we speak.

Prepare our hearts and minds to welcome the continual coming of your Son,
and prepare our courage and conviction to follow the way of the Lord.

Thank you for leading us on the Way.

We are grateful that we can rely on your strength and comfort
when so much around us has become uncertain.

Comfort those who are troubled in mind or spirit as the days grow shorter.

Strengthen the bodies and spirits of those who are tired or suffering.

Embrace those who are living with loss,

and protect children and young people

for whom the future seems confusing and unimaginable.

God who makes all things new,

Turn our lives upside down

and shake out the unnecessary distractions of this season.

Turn our lives upside right

so that our priorities and purposes match those we have learned from Jesus.

Shape and reshape us until we conform to his way of living and his likeness.

Hear us now as we name places, people, and situations that need your care:

(A silence is kept for 20-30 seconds.)

God, you are Alpha and Omega, our beginning and our end.

Strengthen us with your Spirit to build your kingdom,

here and now, now and always.

Blessing:

The blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us, and
remain with us always. Amen.

¹ adopted from worship resource for December 6, 2020 available at <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>