

## Moore Presbyterian Churches

December 19, 2021

*Fourth Sunday of Advent*

### **God calls us to worship**

**Hymn:** #109 “All earth is waiting”

Advent reading and candle lighting (Insert)

Observing the season of Advent is a holy habit the purpose of which is to help us be aware of and receptive to the grace, mercy, and power of God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. Each week is assigned a theme that is a character trait of Christ and thus an effect on the hearts and minds of those who daily trust him.

On the first Sunday of Advent,  
we light the candle of Hope.  
We consider the age in which we're living,  
and we prepare ourselves to welcome Christ  
not only at the cradle,  
not only at the wedding feast of heaven and earth,  
but in the daily, chaotic, messiness  
that is life between the horizons.

On the second Sunday of Advent,  
we light the candle of Peace.  
We remember that as long as we are apart  
from the One who created life itself,  
there will be no peace.  
We thank God for His offer of forgiveness  
realized in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ.  
We turn to Him in heart, mind, and body,  
and rejoice in the peace that passes understanding.

On the third Sunday of Advent,  
we light the candle of Joy.  
And we rejoice in the assurance,  
that with the advent of the Messiah,  
the Father is working all things  
for the redemption and re-creation  
of His Garden of Eden.

Today we light the fourth candle.  
The candle of Love.

**Song:** “A Candle is Burning” (verse 4)

## ***We offer our prayers***

Prayer of Praise

O God, our Saviour,  
With Mary, our spirits rejoice in you this day,  
for you look with favour on all your children.  
You have done great things for us.  
You have scattered the proud and lifted up the lowly.  
You have filled the hungry with good things,  
and kept the promises made to our ancestors.  
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.

Prayer of Confession (Unison):

**God of mercy:  
you have called us to be thankful  
for your good gifts to us,  
but too often we have taken them for granted  
as if we deserved them.**

**You have called us to be hopeful  
through the gospel of Jesus Christ,  
but too often despair has come upon us,  
and the cares of the world have weighed us down.**

**You have called us to be joyful  
in the wonder of your presence among us,  
but too often we become mired in the mundane  
and lose the gift of reverence.**

**By your saving power, O God,  
enable us to celebrate your love for us  
with joy and thanksgiving.**

## ***Assurance of Pardon***

### ***We offer our lives and resources***

*Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar)*

**Hymn:** #128 "There's a voice in the wilderness crying"

## **God speaks to us through his Word**

### Love

Each week of Advent we explore an action of discipleship by which the Holy Spirit helps prepare us to hear and to accept Christ as our Lord and Saviour and thus opens us to receive his hope, peace, joy, and love.

On the Sunday of Hope, the action of discipleship is *watchfulness*:

*Be on guard lest your hearts are weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life. (Luke 21:34)*

On the Sunday of Peace, we look at the action of *repentance*:

*[John] went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 3:3)*

The focus here is on the fact that with the advent of the Messiah, the state of forgiveness is a present reality. We can know peace only when we are living harmoniously with our Creator, and Jesus has made this possible. When our hearts and minds become clouded to this reality; when we are weighed down with frivolous distractions, escapisms, and the worries of this life, it is time to stop and turn to the Lord for strength, consolation, and refuge; to live into the forgiveness which Christ has secured.

On the Sunday of Joy, we look at the action of *prayer and supplication with thanksgiving* as an aid for this act of repentance and thus of embracing the joy of Christ in our own daily ups and downs. We read from Paul's letter to the Philippians:

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Today is the last Sunday of the Advent season, the Sunday of Love.

Our first reading is from the Old Testament prophet Micah, a section in which he describes the ideal king who will one day come at the Lord's behest and rule in an ideal age of restoration and renewal.

READ MICAH 5:2-5a.

Our second reading is from the Gospel of Luke. The section is known as the "annunciation of Jesus' birth." During the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John, the angel Gabriel was sent by God with a message for a woman named Mary.

READ LUKE 1:26-46.

Our third reading is a song. Hymn #123 is a paraphrase of Mary's prayer which has been recorded in Luke 1:46-55. Please stand to sing "My soul gives glory to my God", hymn #123.

**Hymn:** #123 "My soul gives glory to my God"

1. The good news of Christmas is that the king of whom Micah spoke has come. In the town of Bethlehem, she who is in labour has brought forth and the One whose strength is of the LORD has been born.

Jesus has been born; he has been crucified to secure forgiveness on our behalf, to defeat the power of sin, death, and the devil; and to reconcile us with the One who created us and in fellowship with whom is peace and joy beyond human reasoning; he has been resurrected; and he has ascended to the throne of heaven and earth from where he lives to make intercessions on our behalf and rule his church.

The hope of the gospel is that Christ will return at the wedding of heaven and earth when all that is not of God is disposed of and all that is of God is resurrected, restored, and renewed. This is affirmed in every funeral liturgy when we proclaim that the deceased rests in peace "in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life."

The promise of the gospel is that between these two horizons of Christ's incarnation and second coming, while he dwells in the throne room of heaven, his influence is nonetheless palpable.

By the Holy Spirit, the Messiah stands and feeds his flock in the strength of the Lord. And because of that, they can live secure, for he is the one of peace.

**2.** What does that mean, “to live secure”?

Is security having enough good food to eat,  
enough money in the bank,  
a weather-proof shelter in which to live?

Is security having a family,  
friends,  
trustworthy acquaintances?

Is security health,  
medicines,  
enough hospital beds?

Surely all of these things and more contribute to feelings of security.

However, if this is what Micah had in mind when he spoke of the messianic king’s reign; if this is what Mary had in mind when she sang of the Messiah lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry with good things, then one might wonder what influence, if any, Jesus actually has on our human, daily, struggles?!

With the breaking news throughout this week and the dire predictions of the next wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, I wouldn’t wonder if many peoples’ feelings of security have been weakened this week. As we look toward the celebration of Christ’s incarnation this coming Friday, the news certainly casts a shadow on the so-called “Christmas spirit.”

**3.** Claiming Jesus to be King, to be the ruler to whom we devote our lives, does bring with it the promise of security and peace; yet, it does not mean that life will somehow be easier because of our faith.

When Mary chose to accept the angel’s message and yield to the power of the Most High, it doesn’t appear her life became any easier for her faith. She became pregnant without being married. Then, in her final weeks of pregnancy, she took a donkey ride, with Joseph, to Bethlehem where she was forced to give birth on the street – or maybe in a cave – without the help of midwives, mother, or mother-in-law and cradle her new-born boy in a feed trough that was likely little more than a trench dug in the ground! Afterwards, she, Joseph, and Jesus then had to flee for their lives and live

in exile in Egypt before returning to Nazareth from where she would watch her first-born son get arrested, tortured, and crucified!

And yet, she found, in communion with the Lord God and in the promise of His word, the security that allowed her to place herself wholly in his care: “Here am I, the servant of the LORD; let it be with me according to your word.”

In Jesus the love of God was fully expressed in flesh, blood, and bone. His love strengthens us to endure our struggles without losing faith, hope, and joy. This is security. Knowing that in all that comes our way, we are never apart from the love of God in Jesus, who is the Christ.

Jesus is the ruler of whom Micah spoke. And by his governance, we can know sustenance, peace, and security.

#### 4.

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*The action of discipleship as we look toward the celebration of Christmas with the ongoing fears and worries of this age threatening to drive us into the darkness, is to yield to the One who has inherited the ancient throne of David. To say with Mary, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”*

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The danger of trying to do otherwise; to love all who need love in our own strength, is burnout. Emotional exhaustion, dry faith, bitterness, and resentment. Even propagating fear; we probably don’t do so intentionally, yet, when we speak with others and we are not secure in God’s love, we end up contributing to the anxieties of an already anxious world! Yet we’re never asked to love in our own strength. Even the ideal, messianic king couldn’t feed the flocks in his own strength! He does so in the strength of the Lord!

Mary brought God’s love to a hurting world because she rested, secure in the love of the Most High.

As we prepare once again to celebrate the arrival of the King of kings and Lord of lords in whom the love of God was pleased to dwell,

*Be on guard lest your hearts are weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life. (Luke 21:34)*

*Accept and live into the “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”*

*Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*

And, say with Mary:

*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*

Amen.

*Choir anthem (St. Andrew’s): “Love came down at Christmas” ~ Joel Raney*

***We respond with prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession***

God of Zechariah and Elizabeth and John,  
God of Mary and Joseph and Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
Throughout all generations you have been faithful to us.  
You have given new life to the world through sons and daughters,  
through grandchildren and great grandchildren,  
who took up the promises you made to their fathers and mothers  
and followed your way in the world.  
In this time and in the time to come,  
raise up a new generation who will live out the new life you promise in Christ  
Jesus,  
with us and with your church in every neighbourhood and nation.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Thank you, O God, for all the faithful saints we have known in our lives.  
Their trust in you gives us hope whenever our own faith wavers.  
May we be faithful in this generation as others have been before us,  
so that our ministry and mission in Jesus' name will be renewed,  
engaging the world in refreshing, respectful ways.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

We pray today for those struggling with loss and discouragement this season:  
for those who have lost someone dear;  
for those who cannot find meaningful work;  
and all for whom challenge and change make the future uncertain.  
*(Keep a time of silence)*

Embrace them with your compassion and strength to persevere.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those for whom sickness and death  
obscure your promise of health and salvation;  
and for those who have given up on themselves and on the goodness of others.  
We remember those who face conflict in their homes or their homelands,  
who wonder or fear what tomorrow may bring.  
We pray for the creation that has suffered from fire, storm and earthquake this  
year,  
and for the lives disrupted by drought and despair.  
*(Keep a time of silence)*

Embrace all who suffer with your comfort and courage.



Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

God of All Life and Each Life,  
As a challenging year comes to a close, and a new year beckons,  
come to us and be with us once more as we celebrate Christ's birth.  
With the tenderness of your Spirit, lighten our burdens,  
and show us new possibilities for our own lives  
and for the ministries we take up in Jesus' name,  
for we find confidence in the prayer he taught us:

**The Lord's Prayer**

***God sends us with His blessing***

***Hymn:*** #133 "Go, tell it on the mountain"

***Blessing***

***Choral Amen***