

4th Sunday of Advent: Order of worship on December 24, 2023

(CCLI: License Number #3156883) (Welcoming Elder: Anne Neuman)

We Gather

- Welcome and Announcements
- Lighting up the Advent candle (BOP 119, Love is a star Vs. 4)
- Call to worship
- Praise song – BOP 117 Herald! Sound the note of judgment
- Prayer for worship and Lord's Prayer
- Words of Assurance
- Praise song – BOP 164 O little town of Bethlehem
- Prayer with children

We Listen

- Prayer for illumination
- First reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
- Second reading: Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 (Refrain 1)
- Third reading: Luke 1:26-38
- Sermon: Here I am, the servant of the Lord.
- Prayer for the people

We Respond

- Offering, Doxology (BOP 830 Praise God from whom all blessings vs. 1) & Dedication
- Song for the Journey – BOP 129 Prepare the way, O Zion

We Serve

- Benediction

Responsive Call to Worship

(Please see the insert)

Lighting up the Advent Candle Hope Is A Star (BOP#119)

Vs. 4: Love is a flame that burns in our heart. Jesus has come and will never depart.

When God is a child there's joy in our song
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong
And none shall be afraid

Praise song – BOP 117 Herald! Sound the note of judgment

Prayer For Adoration and Confession

God of majesty and mercy, you are powerful, you are holy, and you are loving. You come among us not as a warrior or tyrant, but as a child, new life born among us, reaching out to embrace us in love. And so we come to worship you this day, trusting your wisdom with Joseph, pondering your mystery with Mary. We offer you our love for all that you have been, all that you are, and all that you will be, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, one God, holy and loving, now and forever.

God of mystery and mercy, You came to offer us love, but we confess that we are stubborn and selfish in the ways we live. You came to reconcile all people, but we often nurse grudges and resist repairing relationships. Forgive who we have been, amend who we are, and direct who we shall be, through Jesus Christ who reaches out to us from the manger and the cross.

This time we come to you in prayer that you taught us how to pray: (The Lord's Prayer:)
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. **Give us** today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. **Save us** from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. **For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

Words of Assurance

Words from Christina Rossetti fit the Advent theme for today:

“Love came down at Christmas; Love all lovely, love divine. Love shall be our token, Love for plea and gift and sign.” We meet God's gift of love in Christ Jesus, whose forgiveness restores us for whatever lies ahead. Thanks be to God for this hope and love!

May the Peace of the Lord be with you. Let us take few moments to greet each other and share our peace.

Praise Song: BOP 164 O little town of Bethlehem

Prayer for Illumination:

God of all the ages, the stories of this season are familiar, so send your Holy Spirit to give us a fresh understanding of their significance. Make us attentive to Jesus, the living Word, and gifts he brings into our midst. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

- First reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
- Second reading: Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 (Refrain 1)
- Third reading: Luke 1:26-38

“This is the word of the Lord / Thanks be to God.”

Sermon: Here I am, the servant of the Lord.

Today's sermon title is **“Here I am, the servant of the Lord.”**

What is the most rewarding thing you have done in 2023?

I listened to a radio. A woman from non-athletic family was talking. She was not talented in sports and none of her family members consistently played one sport. But, somehow, she liked tennis and she continued even though she was not a good player. I started to listening in the middle of the conversation, but somehow she received a reward in tennis.

She mentioned 3-D words.

Determination, Devotion, and Dedication

These are great words to achieve goals.

What about you? We value our commitment and perseverance for the sake of achieving goals. Persistence, devotion, passion.

V28, the angel came to Mary. This is the first word, **“Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.”**

Mary was much perplexed by this greeting. Noticing that awkwardness of Mary, the angel continued. **“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.”** God was pleased with Mary. So, here is the plan of God. V31, **“And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”**

Sounds great, but wait.. is it really?

First, it's good or it's a relief that God is pleased with Mary. Usually, when the angel of God appeared to people, it was not a good sign. They won't be able to come before God because of their sin. God is holy and human is not. So, being sinful in front of the Holy one was not a good thing. Holy means different, distinguished, and separated. God, in his nature, is not able to be with us because he is sinless. Because he is holy, he cannot stay with sin, and sinful us. So, the appearance of God or the angel, the messenger, was not considered as a good thing. That is why the angel greeted with the word, **“do not be afraid.”**

So, the first concern is cleared. Mary does not have to be afraid.

But, what is the message? **“Mary, you will give a birth to a boy.”**

Imagine that you were Mary. We cannot know her age for sure, but at that time, culturally, most Jewish girls married in their mid to late teen years according to *NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*. So, it is safe for us to say that Mary was around 16 years old. And she was told to have a baby even before getting married.

Here's the summary. Mary was around 16 years old. She was well received by God. And God was trying to bless her. But, the blessing is to have a baby without getting married and have any sexual interactions.

What a mysterious story! At the same time, how scary it is? Isn't it?

Being a mom is a great blessing, but at the same time, it is a great responsibility and adventure.

So, if you were Mary in today's story, would you take the challenge? OR would you take this as a blessing from God?

At this point, we might wonder, why Mary? Why did God choose Mary? What so special about Mary?

V35, Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

Very reasonable question. So, the angel answered. **The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.**

As a proof, Mary's relative woman who was barren, in her old age was pregnant now. It was possible because nothing is impossible with God.

This answered Mary's question. So, Mary answered, **“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”**

This is the reason why Mary was favoured with God. She questioned how and the angel answered that it would be done by the Holy Spirit. God is possible. So, it was enough for Mary. She did not come up with some kinds of excuses or more questions.

Mary trusted the message of God, the promise of God. And she accepted it.

Hebrews chapter 11 is called the Faith chapter. The Hall of Faith. There are many people who lived in the presence of God, with the power of God, by their faith. By faith, Abel worshipped God. By faith, Noah built an ark. By faith, Abraham obeyed God's commandment. By faith, Moses led the people of God out of slavery. After writing some examples, the author continues.

Hebrews 11:32, MGS version. **"I could go on and on, but I've run out of time. There are so many more – Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets... Through acts of faith, they toppled kingdom, made justice work, took the promises for themselves."** Let's pause here. **Took the promises for themselves?** Wow. Yes.

I sometimes tell you to claim your right to God because we have received God's promise. These people on the list of the Hall of faith TOOK THE PROMISES FOR THEMSELVES. In the same way, we are to claim the promises we have received from God.

Mary too took this promise of God for herself. That's why she was able to say yes to God.

How many of us are able to say yes to this blessing or challenge, like Mary?
If you are, bless you. But, if you are hesitant, I will tell you why.

Your thoughts are more important than who God is. In other words, by faith, Mary was able to obey God. She was ready to take the consequences of God's commandment. She was willing to give up what she had, what she thought, and what she was. God knew that Mary would say yes because God knows each person.

When we need to ask a favour to somebody, who would we ask? Somebody, we think, who would help us. Somebody who would say yes. God, in the same way, is looking for somebody who would say yes to him.

There's a saying, **"Everybody is hiring, but nobody's getting hired."**
There are a ton of job openings, yet many people who want to work can't get the job.

In the perspective of employers, there are too many people but there is nobody.
Too many people want to work, but no one is ready.

In God's eyes, there are too many people who call God Lord and God and Saviour, but there aren't many people who truly accept God as their Lord and Master.

God is pouring out his love upon us. How are we doing?

God is not going to ask us to be Mary. What is our emotion in our hearts?
Is this a relief? Oh... I don't have to sacrifice my life for God...
Or are we sorry that we lost the chance, the blessing!?!?

With God's abundant love and grace, God is still calling each person to join him with his blessings.

When God sees you, what would you want him to say to you?

“Oh my precious daughter, you are my favoured one!”

“Oh my precious son, you are my favoured one!”

Sometimes, we have hardship. When someone says, “I know how you feel.”

Hmm... well, then, we say to ourselves, inside, of course. Huh? Really! Because they are not in our situations. How do you know how I feel!

But, God can say, “I know your pain. I know your difficulties. I know how you feel.”

Because he was there.

The Creator God came into human body. And the most powerful Holy God hung on the cross because of our sin.

We can trust God’s love. He gave up his Kingly powerful Creator position and become same as us. And without any sin, he took all our sins. He gave up everything. In other words, God loves us with his everything.

On this Christmas Eve day, as we remember God’s blessing upon Mary and the promises for us, let us have faith in God. Nothing is impossible for God. God can do everything.

Because almighty God is holding us, when God comes to us, let us stand before God with this confession. “Yes, Lord, Here I am, the servant of the Lord.”

May God be with you on this Christmas Eve.

This is the message of the Lord for us today. Merry Christmas.

Prayer for the people:

Jesus, you came to us as a little baby. But, you are a glorious King and the Most High God. You didn’t want heaven without us, so you brought heaven down to us when you came down to us. Thank you for your love. And thank you for your invitation to participate in your blessings. God of love and grace, give us willing hearts like Mary, so our lives may be used for you.

We want to pray for the world. Around the world, people are celebrating Christmas. May your name be lifted up. May the love of Christ be remembered. May the light of Christ shine upon darkness. Through your light, raise your people. Let us become your hands and feet, so we may carry your love to the people in need. To the areas of danger, hunger, and desperation. In Gaza strip, Ukraine, Prague, especially after massive death after shooting. God of mercy, be present among them in their difficulties. Cry with them and help them know that you are with them. Embrace them with your love and shine your light upon them. Let them find you in the midst of their distress, so their hearts maybe filled with your hope and love.

We also remember our church. There are people who are serving you with all their hearts. They try to be faithful to you with their lives. Bless them. Guide them and provide them their needs. There are health concerns, heal them. There are relational issues, recover the relationships. There are all other difficulties in life. With your power, hold them. Make them stand strong in you. We are the worshipping community. The core value is you. Be present among us. We are yours.

On this Christmas Eve, fill our hearts with love and thankfulness. We glorify you and we enjoy you. Be praised and be honoured through our lives. In Jesus’ precious name, we pray. Amen.

Invitation to the offering: The fourth Sunday in Advent celebrates God's gift of love. At this time of year, we give gifts to express our love. So let your offering today be a sign of your love for God and participation to the blessings God prepared for us. Let us praise God and honour him with the Doxology (BOP #830.)

Doxology 830

Praise God with songs that never cease,
praise God who fills the earth with peace,
praise God for love and joy within;
the Holy Child is born again!

Offering prayer:

God of love, as we praise and worship you with our offering, bless us. Here we are, the servants of the Lord God. Use us to shine your light to this world. Help us love and embrace our surroundings and the people in need, so we make changes with your love. Use us God. Display your love and goodness through us. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

Song for the Journey BOP 795 Christ is coming

Now, it is the time for us to be sent to the world. Jesus Christ came to the earth for who? Believers only? No, God is the God of the whole universe. God is the God of all the people in the past, in the present, and in the future. So, we all need God. We all need Christ as our Saviour and Lord. May Christmas blessing overflow in your hearts, so it may overflow to your surroundings. "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

Benediction: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, And the Love of God, And the intimate fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with us all, now and always. Amen.