

Sunday Worship on December 21, 2025

(CCLI: License Number #3156883) (Welcoming Elder: Dr. Robert Revington)

We Gather

- Welcome and Announcements
- Responsive Call to worship (See the insert)
- Light the candle of love
- BOP 119 Hope of a star (vs. 4)
- Praise song BOP 122 Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel
- Prayer for Worship and the Lord's Prayer
- Words of Assurance
- Praise song 133 Go tell it on the mountain
- Prayer for children

We listen

- Sung prayer for illumination (BOP 445 Open our eyes, Lord)
- First reading: Isaiah 7:10-16
- Second reading: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 (Refrain 1)
- Third reading: Matthew 1:18-25
- Sermon: **Love in the middle of confusion**
- Praise song BOP 124 People in darkness
- Prayer for people

We Respond

- Offering, Doxology (tune BOP 79 Praise God with songs that never cease) & Dedication
- Song for the Journey BOP 139 Hark! The herald angels sing

We Serve

- Benediction
- A Sung Blessing

Responsive Call to Worship (See the insert)

- Light the candle of love
- BOP 119 Hope of a star (vs. 4)

Praise song – BOP 122 Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel

Prayer of Adoration

Emmanuel, God with us, we praise you for your presence throughout the amazing universe you have made. The shining stars sing your praise, which echoes in the depths of space. The smallest snowflake and a baby's tiny fingers reflect your intricate love for the details of every life. In Jesus Christ, you were born among us, one of a kind, yet one with a kind, to show us how your great love is lived out day by day.

Inspire us with your loving Spirit as we move through Advent toward Christmas Day, so that our celebrations of love made flesh in Jesus will share the presence of your love with those who need it most. So may we live the praise we offer to you, Emmanuel, God with us, now and evermore.

Prayer of confession (Unison)

Lord of love, we confess we sometimes find your love daunting.

You called Joseph to honour his love for Mary, even when custom called him to break his engagement.

We confess custom has a hold on us, too, and challenging expectations for love's sake makes us nervous. You call us to love our neighbour, but we resist your call if our neighbour does not please us. You call us to love our enemies, too, but that seems impossible in these contentious times. Forgive us for loving only in the safest situations. Dare us to love as Jesus loved, so he will be born joyfully in us.

Heavenly Father, hear us, as we offer the Prayer that Jesus taught us: (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

Receive the Good News in love. With great mercy, God forgives what we have confessed and offers us new life in Jesu Christ. Know that God's steadfast love is yours this day, and share that love with friends and enemies alike, so that the power of such love can change the world.

May the Peace of Christ be with you. *(Let us bless each other with the peace of the Lord.)*

Praise song BOP 133 Go tell it on the mountain

Prayer for the children

Sung prayer for illumination (BOP 445 Open our eyes, Lord)

- First reading: Isaiah 7:10-16
- Second reading: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 (Refrain 1)
- Third reading: Matthew 1:18-25

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

Sermon: Love in the middle of confusion

Precious people of God, dear sisters and brothers in Christ, grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, as we draw to Christmas, we come to a story that is very human, very quiet, and very real. It's not a story filled with angels in the sky, at least not at first... It is a story filled with confusion, silence, and hard decisions. And right there, in the middle of it all, we discover LOVE.

Matthew begins the Christmas story not with Mary, but with Joseph. That itself is important. Joseph is often overlooked. He speaks no words in this passage. However, we need to notice his faith.

Matthew tells us that Mary was found to be pregnant "from the Holy Spirit." But Joseph does not know this yet. All he knows is that the woman he loves is pregnant, and he is not the father.

We should not rush past this too quickly. This is a moment of deep confusion, maybe anger or sadness. Joseph's dreams are broken. His plans are collapsing. His reputation is at risk. His heart is shattered.

And yet, the Bible tells us something beautiful.

V19, "Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly."

Joseph's righteousness is not harsh. It is gentle. It is shaped by mercy. Before Joseph understands God's plan, he chooses love over shame, compassion over punishment.

This is already a picture of the love God is about to reveal to the world. Even before Jesus' coming.

Then, in the middle of Joseph's confusion, God speaks. An angel appears in a dream and says, **V20, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."**

God begins his message with **"do not be afraid."**

Not because the situation is simple, but because God is with him. God's lesson for us is this. Because God is with us, there is nothing we should be afraid of.

The angel tells Joseph that this child is from the Holy Spirit. This child will save his people from their sins. This child will fulfill God's ancient promise. **V23, "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel."**

Emmanuel = God with us.

Not God above us only.

Not God far away.

But God with us – when? Not only in our joy, happiness, thankfulness, but also, in confusion, in fear, in uncertainty.

Joseph wakes up, and the story turns around quietly but powerfully.

V24, When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

No long explanation. No speech. No debate. No emotional struggle.

Just obedience. Just trust. Joseph just does what the Lord says.

Joseph chooses love when the future is unclear. Joseph chooses trust when answers are incomplete. He chooses faith when the cost is real.

And this is where Advent love meets us.

Love is not only warm feelings and beautiful songs.

Sometimes love is choosing faithfulness when life does not make sense. Sometimes love is staying when it would be easier to walk away. Sometimes love is trusting that God is at work even when we do not see how.

This is the love God shows us in Jesus Christ.

God did not wait for the world to be ready.

God did not wait for clarity, peace, or order.

God entered into the mess.

In Jesus, God stepped into human confusion.

Into broken families.

Into fragile trust.

Into a world longing for salvation.

And **that is why Jesus is named Jesus – v21, “for he will save his people from their sins.”**

Jesus saves his people, not from inconvenience, not from discomfort. Not even from confusion. But Jesus saves his people FROM SIN, from everything that separates us from God and from one another.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, if you are confused today..

If your life feels uncertain.. if you are carrying questions without answers...

You are not outside God's story.

You may be right in the middle of it. Just like Joseph...

The love of Jesus Christ meets us not after everything is resolved, but while we are still waiting.

Emmanuel means God is present with us, when and where?

God is right here and right now.

So as we prepare our hearts for Christmas, may we receive this love. May we trust this love. And may we live this love – quietly, faithfully, courageously – just like Joseph.

May the love of Christ be with you in this 4th Sunday of Advent.

This is the message of the Lord for us today.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, we thank you for your love that meets us in the middle of our confusion. When we do not understand, you are still at work. When we are afraid, you are still with us.

Help us, like Joseph, to trust you, to obey you, and to choose love even when the way forward is unclear. Anchor our hearts in Emmanuel, Jesus Christ, who saves us, who walks with us, and who never lets us go.

In Jesus' holy name, we pray. Amen.

Praise song BOP 124 People in darkness

Prayer for the people:

Faithful and loving God, you are the light that shines in the darkness, the hope that does not disappoint, the peace that calms our restless hearts, the joy that rises even in sorrow, and the love that holds us together.

As Christmas draws near, we bring before you the burdens we carry. The worries we name aloud and the ones we keep hidden. We pray for those who are confused, grieving, lonely, or overwhelmed. Be Emmanuel to them, God, stay close with them.

Pour your peace into a divided world. Renew hope where despair has taken root. Restore joy where weariness has settled. And teach us to love as you have loved us, with patience, humility, and grace.

We place our lives again in your faithful hands, trusting that you are still writing your story among us.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

Invitation to the offering:

Sisters and brothers in Christ, God's love came to us as a gift. It was freely given, but deeply costly. As we offer our gifts today, we do so not out of obligation, but out of gratitude for the love we have received in Jesus Christ. Let us give generously, trusting that God will use what we offer to bring hope, peace, joy, and love into this hurting world.

As we give our offerings, let us glorify God.

(BOP #79, Praise God with songs)(words are on the screen)

Offering prayer:

God of love and grace, receive these gifts as signs of our trust and gratitude. Bless what we give, and use it for your purposes – to share Christ's love, to serve those in need, and to build your kingdom of grace and truth.

May our giving reflect the love you have shown us in Jesus Christ, who gave himself fully for the life of the world. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

Song for the Journey – BOP 139 Hark! The herald angels sing

Now, it is our time to be sent to the world where God called us to be.

Today, we have heard that God's love does not wait for clarity or perfection. In Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God meets us in confusion and calls us to trust. Like Joseph, we are invited to choose faithfulness, mercy, and love, believing that God is present and God is at work, regardless the path ahead is not clear yet. God is with you here and now.

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