

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, December 19th, 2021
Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Peace in Christ
Luke 3: 7-18**

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship (Responsive)

God who spoke to Mary and Elizabeth,
speak your Word to us now.

God who blessed them with new life,
bless us with great expectation.

God who gave them songs of praise to sing,
receive our joyful praise.

God who loves beyond all measure,
we are here to worship you with hearts full of love.

Prayer of Invocation

*O God, our Saviour,
With Mary, our spirits rejoice in you this day,
for you look with favor 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, in whose name we pray. Amen*

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Prepare the way of the Lord.

We light this candle in hope,
the hope of our coming Savior, Jesus.

Prepare, then, the way of the Lord.

Prepare the way of the Lord.
We light this candle in love,
The love that Jesus, our Savior, has for us.

Prepare, then, the way of the Lord.

Prepare the way of the Lord.
We light this candle in joy,
the joy that we have in Jesus, our Savior.

Prepare, then, the way of the Lord.

Prepare the way of the Lord.
We light this candle in peace,
the peace that Jesus, our Savior, gives to the world.

Prepare, then, the way of the Lord.

Opening Hymn # 145: "O Come, All Ye Faithfull (V 1, 3)

O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold him,
born the King of angels.

Refrain:

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n!
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing: [Refrain]

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

**God of Life and Love,
 The stories of Advent remind us that you are a God of surprises.
 You surprised Elizabeth with news she would bear a child late in life.
 You surprised Mary with news she would bear our Saviour.
 Your surprises overturned their lives
 We confess we do not always meet life's surprises with the same courage.
 Forgive us when we hesitate to greet you in the unexpected.
 Forgive us when we prefer routine over new possibilities. Amen**

Assurance of Pardon

Surely God's salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
 that his glory may dwell in our land.
 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
 righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
 Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
 and righteousness will look down from the sky.
 The Lord will give what is good,
 and our land will yield its increase.
 Righteousness will go before him
 and will make a path for his steps.
 In Christ, God's salvation is at hand, and righteousness has come.
Thanks be to God!

The Lord's Prayer

**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 the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen.**

Responsive Reading

Hebrews 10:5-10

*Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
 "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
 but a body have you prepared for me;*

in burnt offerings and sin offerings

you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.' ”

When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law),

then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second.

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Music Ministry:

“He Will Come” by Senior Choir & Byeong Uk Kim

Prayer for illumination

Open our ears, O God, to hear your voice speaking to us through the scriptures.
Open our hearts to recognize your presence with us and know your direction for us.
May we say with Mary, “Let it be with me according to your Word.” **Amen.**

Scripture

Luke 1:39-45

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Children’s Hymn # 141: “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (V 1, 4)

O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by;

yet in thy dark streets shineth
 the everlasting light.
 The hopes and fears of all the years
 are met in thee tonight.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
 descend to us, we pray,
 cast out our sin and enter in,
 be born in us today.
 We hear the Christmas angels
 the great glad tidings tell;
 O come to us, abide with us,
 our Lord Immanuel! Amen.

Children's Lesson



Under a week from now many of you will be sitting around the Christmas tree. Surrounded by people who you love and who love you. There will be smiles, and laughter and sharing and caring.

The focus for many of the younger people will be the gifts which are piled up under the tree. They will be looking to open each of them with an expectant heart. The brightly colored wrappings and bows draw the eye and people's minds roll through all of the possible gifts which could be under the tree for them. Hoping for things they have desired all year long. Those big, bright boxes usually being the ones we eye first, knowing that they are likely something we really wanted.

When I was young, we use to play a game where you had to guess what the gift was before you opened it. You would shake it, put it up your ear and listen carefully, try anything you could so that you might be able to guess what the gift was. In all the years we did this, I do not think anyone ever guessed what the gift was accurately.

What if there was one small gift under the tree, mixed in with all the other gifts, that was wrapped in plain brown paper and tied with string? Would we think this could be the best gift we receive this year. Probably not, we would likely leave it to open last, assuming it was something simple. I doubt it would generate much excitement for us.

This might be why so many people miss the most important gift we get every Christmas, the gift of Jesus. God's gift to us, his son Jesus Christ did not come in bright fancy wrappings. His parents were not a king and queen, instead they were a virgin and a carpenter, they did not live-in luxury, but instead lived like everyone else. He was not

born in a hospital or even in a home surrounded by a family that loved him, instead he came into this world in a stable, surrounded by animals.

God's gift to the world was his son, who saved all of us. When Mary met Elizabeth the baby inside Elizabeth recognized this great gift from God and leapt with joy! Mary was blessed because she brought us the greatest gift we will ever receive in our life, in plain brown wrapper tied with string.

This Christmas when we are busy focused on the brightly colored presents under the tree, let us try to remember the real gift that we received from God 2000 years ago. God out of his love gave us His Son, the greatest gift of all, the one who would bring us salvation.

Let us pray,

Loving God, we thank you for bringing us here today to gather in your house for worship. We thank you for the gift we have received of salvation through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Please bless us, and watch over us, sending the Holy spirit to be in work in us so we remember that this season is not about the gifts we receive from our friends and family, but instead is about your love for us and the gift we received from your son. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Sermon

Through the previous weeks of Advent, we have touched on the hope, love, and joy that we can find in following Jesus Christ as our lord and saviour. We have studied the scripture and discovered ways we are called to live and to serve others not only during the season of advent but all year long. We also have admitted that truthfully though saying these things may be simple, actually acting upon them and living a Christian life filled with love, generosity and integrity is not a simple thing to do. Which brings us to this week the last week of Advent and the peace we will find in our lives when we fully accept Jesus to be our Lord and Saviour.

We have stepped backwards in time once more. This time we are with Mary the mother of Jesus while he was still a baby in her womb while she visits with Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist.

What makes this visit special is a true understanding of the situation that Mary was living in at the time. Let us look at her life for a moment.

Mary was a young, unmarried, Jewish girl, that was engaged to Joseph, who was likely a well-known and respected carpenter, a descendant of the line of David! How exciting this must have been for her, a simple commoner that was engaged to be married to someone who was a descendant of David. She probably had images of the grand

wedding feast going through her head, imaginings of how wonderous her life would be even in Nazareth.

Nazareth was a small town, one that was not well known or well liked. It had a few hundred citizens, and a local garrison of the Roman army was stationed there. For most people of Jewish decent this would mean the city was unclean, and they would avoid having anything to do with Nazareth or its peoples.

John 1:46

⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Even Nathanael who would become one of Jesus's disciples had these thoughts about town of Nazareth, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'

Mary is most likely a well-known girl in the town, a faithful Jew that observed the laws and had been chosen to be betrothed to the ancient bloodline of David. Then suddenly out of nowhere appears an Angel of the Lord and turns her world upside down.

She goes from a life where the world seemed to be everything a young girl could dream of to a world where she risks alienation, being outcast or even killed for violation of the Jewish laws. And she experiences all of this because she answers the call of God.

Imagine young Mary, suddenly pregnant trying to explain to her parents that an Angel of the Lord appeared to her and told her she was going to have the messiah. How did her parents react? We are never told in the scriptures; we do know however that Joseph planned to quietly divorce her because of the stigma of a child born out of wedlock.

This young woman had chosen to answer her call from God and because of that she risked losing everything as she knew it in her life. She was going to go through 9 months of trials and tribulations, especially right at the start when she could lose her family and her future husband. Yet, as we know, God's plans always come to fruition and Joseph is visited by an Angel in a dream and does not divorce Mary.

What helps make the message that God is in control of everything even clearer is the Angel telling Mary that Elizabeth, her relative and a woman beyond the age of bearing children, was also with child. So, Mary sets out to visit her relative in the scripture we are reading today.

Remember that we know the full story, we know what happens in the end. We all know that she is truly giving birth to Jesus, but at this time, Mary is placing her full trust in the Lord.

Luke 1:39-45

³⁹In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Mary makes a trip of around 160 km to the region of Judea to visit Elizabeth. Mary makes this trip simply because of her faith. She did not know how people would react to her claiming to be the mother of the Messiah, but she was probably fairly sure it would not be with open arms. She makes her way to Elizabeth’s house and is given her first reassurance that Jesus, the baby growing inside her womb, is in fact the Son of God.

When John, also in his mother’s womb, hears the voice of Mary he leaps. He jumps for joy in the womb, if you have ever felt a baby kick you know that it is a pretty clear indication that there is a living being inside the womb. Elizabeth at that instant, without being told that Mary is with child knows through the Holy Spirit that she is blessed.

Mary is blessed because she believed. This teenage girl, who had everything a young girl from a poor town could want to come into her life, yet still chose to place her faith in the Lord even if it meant giving up all of the things she dreamed of her entire young life.

Mary is blessed because she had faith in the promises that God had given her, she had faith in his power to carry out his plans, even when the world might be in chaos. Mary had faith in the things she could not see or understand, and when she met Elizabeth that faith became a reality. She knew the moment that Elizabeth spoke to her about her child and her blessing that all of the promises that God had made would be fulfilled.

Imagine the wave of peace that must have flowed over her at that moment. The instant that she knew without a doubt that she was going to be the mother of the Son of God. That God had entrusted her to be the one to give birth to, nurture and raise his Son.

Mary knew at that moment that all of the promises that God had made throughout the scripture were true and would be fulfilled.

Like Mary knew at that moment that all of God’s promises would be fulfilled, we also need to know that all of God’s promises to us will be fulfilled.

We should find peace in our lives knowing that God has promised us:

I will never leave you nor forsake you

I will always be with you, even until the end of time

I will forgive your sins and remember your inequities no more

I will give you the strength to overcome your temptations

I will use you to make a difference in this world

These are just a few of the promises which God has given to his people. God in his scriptures lays out all of the promises he has for his people, including the promise of salvation and eternal life because of our faith in Jesus as our lord and saviour.

Like Mary we are called keep our faith even when others may not believe the same things which we do.

Mary knew people were going to talk about her. She knew she ran the risk of losing her husband to be, Joseph. Mary even knew that no one would believe her story about the Angel visiting her. She kept her faith knowing that she might be sacrificing her reputation, knowing that she would be the subject of gossip and knowing she might even be rejected by her family, friends, and church.

This happens to us as well. When we chose to follow our faith, we risk losing the things of this world. When we focus on raising our children in a Christlike manner, we are criticized for not giving them freedom. When we fight for the ones we love, or for the rights of those who are unloved by the world, we are often misunderstood and end up hurt and feeling like we are alone fighting against the world. Even when we are engaged in God's work, we are judged by others who do not care or understand why we are doing the things we do because of our faith.

Often when we do the things which we know are right, loving God first, living with integrity, being generous with our time and money, teaching our children to live with morals, ethics and respect the world itself twists what we are doing and finds a way to judge us and turn our faith against us.

When this happens, we just need to remember Mary and what she did, she kept believing and trusting in God. She did not give up and run and hide from the world. She stood up and became the person that God called her to be, and we need to do the same. We only have one Master, one God, who knows exactly what is going on in our lives and has the power to provide us with the peace in our hearts to make it through anything that happens in our lives. Like Mary we need to be willing to be ridiculed by the world, to not give in the pressures to conform and instead to place our trust in God alone.

We need to be like Mary and know that our faith does not make life easier. The Angel that appeared to Mary did not promise her a simple life as the mother of Jesus. She was not suddenly rich, living well and with servants, even though God could have easily done those things.

Instead, when she was 8 months pregnant and living with her carpenter husband in the little town of Nazareth which was detested, she was told she needs to get up and make a long and difficult journey to a distant city. She then gives birth to her child, the messiah, in one of the humblest settings possible, not a hospital or in a home surrounded by family and friends who love her. No Mary gives birth to baby Jesus in a stable, surrounded by animals.

This is also true for us today. Being Christian does not instantly grant us a wonderful and easy life, that's not what God calls each of us for. In fact, following God often means living a life of sacrifice. Like Mary instead of living a life of luxury we are often called to live a simple and humble life serving our lord.

Our roads will be rough, they will have mountains and hills, they will have curves and sways, they will be filled with branches and rocks and other things on which we might stumble. It might even feel like we are always on an uphill incline as we move towards what it is that God is calling for us to do. However, our faith is what allows us to keep on the path, keep beating down that incline, removing those bends, clearing those obstacles, and finding peace and joy in the presence of the Lord.

This life is not an easy life and being faithful to God makes it even more difficult. Like Mary we may face being alienated, becoming an outcast, or even killed in some regions of the world because of our Faith in Christ. There are our brothers and sisters in Christ who face persecution each and every day, who live their lives knowing that their faith can cost them everything, yet they carry on, they keep their faith Why would someone do that you might ask? Why would someone risk their very life for a God who they cannot see or hear? The answer is simple, because of the promise that God has given them of eternal life and the peace that they can find in even the most trying of circumstances because of their faith in that promise.

Like Mary who had her life radically altered from her plans we need to keep our faith even in the midst of chaos. Keep our faith, keep believing in our God and his promises, even when our roads become rough. This is not easy, it is not something everyone can do, but it is what we are called to do as Christians.

When the virgin Mary, the young girl with all of her hopes and dreams before her met with the Angel of the Lord and told her she would become pregnant with the Son of God, she asked how this was possible, she had never lain with a man. The Angel explained not only would she become pregnant with the Son of God, but also that the barren Elizabeth, Mary's relative, would be with child but also her. He told her:

Luke 1:37**³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."**

This is the truth. This is the answer we need to always turn back to when we find ourselves in turmoil. In this answer we can always find peace.

When human solutions seem impossible, we need to remember that God can make the impossible happen. God is not bound by our human limitations, bound by time or any of the laws of science that we discover. God is God. God has in the past, is in the present and will continue to in the future, to intervene in human history, to bring his plans to fruition.

Broken relationships that we feel can never be mended, health issues for which there is no known cure or no prognosis of healing. Injuries and losses that radically alter our lifestyle and make it seem like we cannot go on. Financial challenges, bankruptcy and debt that may seem beyond even our greatest efforts. God makes ways where all things seem impossible.

This is the real meaning behind Philippians 4:13

Philippians 4:13**¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**

This is not a verse that tells us we can do anything we set our hearts to because God gives us strength. Instead, it is a verse that teaches us that whatever is going on in our lives God is there with us and will give us the strength to fulfil those things he has called for us to do.

Nothing is impossible with God. Mary believed in a God who was capable of doing the impossible. Her faith gave her the strength to trust in God and trust her entire life into his hands. When we are in places where we are tempted to question our God, to question our faith, we need to be like Mary and trust in our God who can do the impossible.

When we trust in a God that is capable of doing the impossible, it no longer matters what the people around us think about, say to, or do to us. When we believe in a God who is capable of doing the impossible it no longer matters the life situations we are in, how many twists are in the road or how high the mountains are in front of us, because we know that God is capable of levelling everything out and removing the obstacles that lay in front of us. When we believe in a God that is capable of the impossible, we can endure anything that is laid out before us because we know that he will fulfil the promises he has laid out before us in his word. When we believe in a God that is capable

of the impossible, we can be like Mary, at peace in our lives, because we know we are blessed and have faith that our God will always fulfil all his promises.

Let us all have faith like Mary and find peace in our covenant with God.

Let us pray,

Almighty God, your Son, our Savior, Jesus became flesh and made his dwelling among us. In him you have revealed yourself, your love, and your plan for all humanity. By his Word, make us ready for his coming. Keep our hearts repentant, constantly turning to your path of righteousness. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and uphold us with your free Spirit; through him who came to give himself to us and to make us his own, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Hymn # 135: "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks By Night" (V 1, 4)

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
all seated on the ground,
an angel of the Lord came down,
and glory shone around.

"The heavenly babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all meanly wrapped in swaddling bands
and in a manger laid."

Invitation to Offering

We make our offering this day with hearts full of love, filled with the hope and joy this season brings. Give knowing God's love will spread far and wide through what we offer in Jesus' name.

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3) We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer.

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspert offering@gmail.com Please include your Offering Envelope # in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of

your donation to go to a specific fund (eg Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer

God of Life and Love, receive our gifts this day as tokens of our love for you and signs of our willingness to share that love in the world around us. Bless our lives as well as our gifts, so that we may be a blessing to others for the sake of the Christ Child, our Saviour, and our friend.

Closing Hymn # 131: "Angels From the Realms of Glory" (V 1, 4)

Angels from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
ye who sang creation's story
now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Refrain:
Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Saints, before the altar bending,
watching long in hope and fear,
suddenly the Lord, descending,
in his temple shall appear.

Pastoral Prayer

*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 neighborhood and nation.*

*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.*

*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.
Embrace them with your compassion and strength to persevere.*

*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.
Embrace all who suffer with your comfort and courage.*

*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. **Amen***

Benediction

*May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely;
and may your spirit and soul and body
be kept sound and blameless
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The one who calls you is faithful,
and he will do this. **Amen***