

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, December 5th, 2021
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Love in Christ
Luke 3: 1-6

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship (Responsive)

A voice in the wilderness cries out:

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill be made low.

The crooked shall be made straight, and rough places, smooth.

A voice in the wilderness cries out:

All people shall see the salvation of God!

Lift up your hearts in expectation!

We will lift up our praise to the One who is coming into the world once more.

Prayer of Invocation

*God of peace and promise,
you are the giver of life, living in us through the power of your Holy Spirit.*

*You are the voice that calls us from our wandering,
setting us on a new path.*

*You are the living water that purifies us,
baptizing us for service in the world that so badly needs your love.*

*Refresh us in this time of worship,
and reignite our desire to serve you each and every day.*

Glory, honor, and praise be yours now and always,

Holy One, Holy Three,

One God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. 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.*

Opening Hymn #124: “Come, Thou-Long Expected Jesus”

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Call to Confession

*Prepare the way of the Lord!
Let us make our confession to God.*

Prayer of Confession

**Merciful God,
our baptism proclaims the washing away of our sin
and the start of our new life in Christ.
But we confess that we still live in sin.
We sin against you and one another,
in what we do and in what we fail to do.**

**We excuse ourselves,
and take comfort in familiar habits and traditions.
Forgive us when we mistake such comfort for the peace you offer us in Christ Jesus.
Prepare our hearts to embrace new ways of following him.**

Assurance of Pardon

*Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, proclaimed this hope:
"By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us, giving light to those in darkness,
guiding our feet in the way of peace."
Receive God's tender mercy today.
Trust that God's peace will prevail for all those who seek forgiveness in Jesus' name.*

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

Luke 1:68-79

⁶⁸ *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people*

⁶⁹ **and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,**

⁷¹ *that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,*

⁷³ **the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.**

⁷⁶ *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,*

*⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,*

**⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high**

**⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”**

Music Ministry

“An Advent Awakening”

Prayer for illumination

*Holy God, through your scriptures,
You have revealed your Word in scripture to your people across many generations.
In the fullness of time, you revealed your Living Word in Jesus Christ.
Now, by the power of your Holy Spirit,
open our minds and hearts to you,
so that we find new ways to follow you faithfully in this generation. Amen.*

Scripture

Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

**“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,
⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”**

Children’s Hymn # 157: “Away in a Manger”

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head;
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,
And fit us for heaven, to live with Thee there.

Children's Lesson



Christmas is coming! Think about it, today is December 4th, its only 20 more days until Christmas Eve! Are you ready? Have you bought and wrapped all the presents for your family and friends, or do you still have more to get?

What about your house is it decorated, is the Christmas tree up? How about the lights and other decorations? I remember one of my favorite parts of Christmas preparations was the baking and chocolate making, mostly because I got to eat all the ones that turned out wrong.

Presents, decorations and food are all things we do to prepare for Christmas. But how do we prepare for Christ?

John the Baptist was telling the people of his time to prepare for the coming of Christ. John knew that many people in his time were not really focused on being good followers of God. He spent his days telling people to get ready for the coming of Jesus. He wanted people to stop focusing on the wrong things, things of the world and instead get them focused on the right thing, God! He was telling them it was time for them to get their hearts back in the right place.

He wanted people to know, no matter how good the people thought they were, no matter how much they thought they were God's followers, there were parts of their lives where God was not first. Just like people today, people in John the Baptist's time struggled with dishonesty, selfishness, pride, jealousy, and other things which took their attention away from God. John was telling them not to get distracted from the straight path to God and salvation by being led away by worldly temptations.

This Christmas season as you are getting ready to celebrate with family and friends, as you are getting ready for Christmas eve and Christmas day spend some time getting yourselves ready for Christ.

Spend some time in reading your Bible, in prayer and in fellowship with other Christians. Ask God to help you keep your path to him straight and to take away those things which take you away from him and his kingdom. Ask him to take the dishonesty, selfishness, pride, jealousy, and other things from your life and instead fill your heart with a desire for God.

Let us pray together right now and ask him to begin his work in us,

Dear Lord,

As we prepare for the Christmas season, please be at work in each of us preparing us for Christ. Help us to give up those things which hurt our relationship with you and others and instead build us up in ways that Glorify you here on earth. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sermon

As we enter into the second week of Advent we are moving backwards in Jesus's life. Last week we spoke about the prophecy of his second coming and how it should bring us hope in our lives. This week as we look at the beginning of His ministry and a man who was doing what we are supposed to be doing today.

John the Baptist was actively waiting for the coming of Jesus, his eyes focused on God alone, his heart guarded from all the things that could distract him from God and proclaiming the word of God to all whom would listen.

Luke 3:3

³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

He was both a prophet and a preacher. He spoke about sin and the importance of repentance, and because of this he was not liked by the authorities. In fact, it was his repeated calling out of the sins of Herod that eventually resulted in his beheading. However, his real purpose in the scripture was to announce and prepare the way for the first coming messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. We are God's people, and we are also called to announce His second coming to the world as we celebrate advent.

What is the message we are to bring to the world? Last week it was the message of hope, even when all things might seem to be going against us, we have hope in Christ. This week it is the message of God's love for his people.



How would you define love? A group of young children were asked to explain love and how they see it in their lives. Their responses are both interesting and instructive for anyone who is trying to understand what love is. One said, "Love is when my mommy makes a cup of coffee for my daddy and takes a little taste before she gives it to him to make sure it tastes okay." Another said, "Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you've left him alone all day." Some advice was given by yet another child, "You really shouldn't say, 'I love you' unless you really mean it, but if you mean it, you should say it a lot, people forget." One bright young boy said, "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth." And finally, 7-year-old Bobby said, "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."

In this season when we are caught up in the excitement it is easy for us to become lost in the material things and miss what love really is. We get caught up in the parties, the time with friends and family and we miss the message of Christmas.

John 3:16-17

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The message of Christmas is that God loves the world. This is the message we are asked to bring to others in this hectic season. To help people find love in their lives here on earth and the hope of the eternal life to come.

Luke 3:4-6

⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

**'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.**

**⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,**

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Luke quotes Isaiah and the prophecy of the coming of the messiah. He begins with 'Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight'. Since the beginning of time when a ruler or someone of authority was passing through the land, they would send someone ahead of their caravan to tell the people to prepare the road for them.

What they meant by it was a warning to those who lived along the path. If there was no road already present, they were to get out there and make a road.

Anyone who has walked through the woods knows this expression well. When you walk through the wood you follow the beaten paths that the animals create. If there is no path, we might have to create one ourselves. I am sure a few of you have done this in the deep winter snow, someone out front cuts through the snow with their legs, and then everyone who follows beats down the path until a good trail exists.



This is what John the Baptist was doing while he was preaching and baptizing the people who came to him. He was preparing a path for the king.

This is our role, to beat the path for Christ, to prepare the way for the Lord when he returned here to earth. We need to create a path so that someone, maybe a friend, a coworker, a classmate, or even a family member can follow you on the path to Jesus that you have created.

The reality is just like a path through the woods, there are often rocks, branches and other stumbling blocks that are along the path of a relationship with other people. The tension of the holidays often brings all of these little stumbling blocks to a head. We get angry when we are waiting in line, or when someone cuts us off on the road. We get frustrated when people take their time in front of us while we are in a hurry, especially now that covid has also slowed down and complicated the paths we walk in life. There are even family members, coworkers, classmates, and others who we have issues with that we might not want to be around during this season.

Make a path toward them. Do not get caught up in the emotions that draw us away from Christ, instead embrace the love he has given you and make a path of reconciliation with those who you have an issue with, make a path of peace and forgiveness with those who anger you. You might already have a path to walk on, or you might be the one cutting through the snow but make a path for God to enter into the

relationship, so that they can experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in you.

Galatians 5:22

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

This holiday season pray that God blesses you with the fruits of the spirit and that you can use them as tools to work on the relationship paths in your life. We need to pray, pray again and then pray some more. Prayer is us walking along the path to our relationship with God. We need to pray until the path is so worn down the jagged rocks, branches and other hindrances and stumbling blocks have become smoothed down and worn away by the passage of our prayers.

The more we smooth the path between ourselves and God the more we will be able to work on creating and smoothing the paths between ourselves and those people around us in our daily lives. The paths we are called to create for the Lord to walk on both in our lives and the lives of others. Paths that we create through our example as a Christian, in our relationships with everyone in our lives. Paths which allow us to not only show what a Christian life is like, but also to glorify God in word and deed.

Luke 3:5

**Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,**

The paths of our life are often like this, filled with challenges. We see these challenges in the lives of all those around us, people who are going through hardship, suffering or sorrow. Especially during this season, the stress of life and the holidays can reach a critical mass and people breakdown.

Throughout the year people often miss the opportunity to help others who they see suffering, but something about the Christmas season warms even the coldest heart and we begin to see generosity and good will.

This year we are going to see people in this community struggling at Christmas, rising food costs and gas costs are going to have a large impact on those who live on a fixed income. People who were already struggling in the past are going to feel like they are drowning in debt.

Others are going to be struggling with loneliness in their own homes or in a retirement home. Longing to see loved ones. Still others will be alone because of the loss of a loved one.

These are the valleys and bends that exist in the roads of people's lives. The climb up the side of a mountain can seem too much for many people. Some might even be too terrified to move down the path, even if it is there right in front of them.



I was once on a sheep hunting trip in the Rockies with my father and his friend. We were on our way up to the top of the mountain range to set up our camp when we discovered his friend was afraid of heights. He was afraid to move up the mountain. No matter how much we explained that it was safe to walk on the little sheep trail we had been following, he would not budge. He was stuck in his emotional response, in his situation as he perceived it at that time.

So, what we did is tie a rope around his waist and my father took one end and I took the other and we slowly guided him up the mountainside until we reached level ground. A footing where he was comfortable again and could once again walk on the path.

This is what we are called to do with those who are suffering financially and emotionally this season. To be there and guide them to a place where they can once again get their own footing on their paths and begin to walk. Even when we think the path is fine to walk on, others will be stuck in their emotional responses to their life situations, and we need to tie a rope around them and help them through the mountains and around the bends of their paths.

Those people who are feeling hopeless, saddened, lonely and lost are on a rough road and by showing them compassion, mercy, grace and love you can help smooth out and straighten their roads, giving them the chance to see Jesus in you and how you live and care for others.

Luke 3:6

“and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

This is the message of Christmas; this is the message of the second coming of Christ. All flesh, all mankind is given the opportunity to experience the salvation of God. God sent his son into the world so that He could save us. Jesus died on the cross for our sin, giving us an eternal life. Through his sacrifice we are given the gift of reconciliation, forgiveness, hope, grace, mercy, and power with the father. We are saved.

This is what Christmas is about. It is a story about God's love for his people, God's plans for his peoples. It has no bounds, once we have worn a path to Christ we are saved and live without condemnation.

John the Baptist preached a message of repentance to the people, we get to preach a message of redemption. Those who believe in him are saved, this should be the message we share with everyone we meet all year long, but it seems we do a better job of it during Christmas and Easter.

This Christmas we need to be focused on the paths in our lives and the paths in the lives of those around us. We should be seeking to straighten out and flatten the path to Christ in our life through prayer, through worship and praise and through study of the scripture. We should be working on our path to the Lord every day, ensuring that we are making it smooth and removing anything which may cause us to stumble. Keeping our eyes on the Lord and guarding our hearts.

We also need to be focus on the paths we are creating into other people's lives through our relationships. Are we living a Christlike life with everyone around us, are we living as examples of God's forgiveness, God's mercy, God's grace, and God's love? Are we creating paths of reconciliation and forgiveness and paths of peace and power? When people think about their interactions with us are they seeing man or are they experiencing Christ?

This Christmas season let us focus on the message of

Luke 2:14

**¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"**

Let us walk paths that Glorify God in everything we do and speak. Let us walk paths that bring God's love to others. Let us be a little more generous with ourselves this Christmas season, setting aside our own personal desires and instead being a little more generous with our time, our money, and our love, helping those people who are walking up high mountains and winding roads.

This Christmas season let us all put Christ first in our lives and be someone who brings the blessings of his love, his salvation, his grace, his mercy, his forgiveness, and his power into the lives of others in this community.

Let us Pray,

Lord God, heavenly Father,

*we give you worthy thanks for giving a blessed, gracious baptism,
 first through John the Baptist,
 and have brought it also to us with the promise of the forgiveness of sins,
 the Holy Spirit and eternal life through your Son, Jesus Christ.
 Preserve us in this faith with your grace and mercy,
 that we may never doubt your promise,
 but be comforted in all temptations.
 Grant us your Holy Spirit
 that we may renounce sin
 and always continue in the righteousness given us in baptism,
 until by your grace,
 we obtain eternal salvation;
 through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one true God, now and forever. **Amen.***

Source: Veit Dietrich

Hymn # 127: "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne"

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,
 When Thou camest to earth for me;
 But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room
 For Thy holy nativity.
 O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
 There is room in my heart for Thee.

When the heavens shall ring, and the angels sing,
 At Thy coming to victory,
 Let Thy voice call me home, saying "Yet there is room,
 There is room at My side for thee."
 My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus,
 When Thou comest and callest for me.

Invitation to Offering

*We make our offering today
 as a sign of our commitment to the reign of Christ among us,
 trusting that our gifts will accomplish more than we might ever imagine,
 because God will bless them—and us.*

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

*Mighty and Merciful God,
we bring our gifts to you,
trusting that your blessing will multiply their effects in the world.
Use them and us to prepare the way for Christ
to enter lives with his compassion and courage,
so that the world will know his peace and trust his name. Amen.*

Closing Hymn # 155: "Once in Royal David's City"

Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ, her little child.

And our eyes at last shall see him,
through his own redeeming love,
for that child, so dear and gentle,
is our Lord in heav'n above,
and he leads his children on
to the place where he is gone.

Pastoral Prayer

*Come, Christ Jesus, be our guest.
Enter our lives today with your blessing.
We are lonely for you and the love you bring.
Draw near to us in friendship and faithfulness,
so that in this season of celebration, we may know you are near,*

and be filled with gratitude, even in the face of challenge and uncertainty.

*Come, Christ Jesus, be our guide.
Show us the way to wisdom and gratitude
in the face conspiracy theories and distrust.
We thank you for the kindness we know
in friends and good neighbors, in warm houses and warm smiles.
We pray for those who have lost their way in life
and feel like there is no place to turn.
Equip us to reach out to those who need your embrace and ours.*

*Come, Christ Jesus, be our hope.
Touch us with your healing and grace in every way we need these gifts.
We remember before you those we know and those known to you alone
who are living with loss or illness this season,
those who face depression or discouragement,
all who are worried about the impact of the pandemic,
and any who will find it hard to be merry this year.*

*Come, Christ Jesus, and rule in our lives.
Claim your rightful place in our hearts.
This world is struggling for the justice and mercy you bring.
We remember before you places marked by violence and upheaval,
and the devastating impacts of the climate crisis.*

*Draw near to all leaders and citizens working for peace and justice.
Encourage honorable action and co-operation
in confronting global challenges and local needs.
Give hope to people under oppression
and those who live with fear or hunger day by day.
Hasten the day when the world's peoples will live as neighbors,
reconciled in your truth and freedom.
In Jesus name we pray.
Amen.*

Benediction

*May the Lord make you increase and abound in love
for one another and for all,
just as we abound in love for you.
And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness
that you may be blameless before our God and Father
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*