

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
Sunday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024  
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Love  
Fourth Sunday of Advent  
Micah 5:2

**Welcome**

**Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

Jesus, Son of the living God, splendor of the Father, eternal light.

**Lord, we praise you!**

Jesus, King of glory, sun of justice, son of the virgin Mary.

**Lord, we praise you!**

Jesus, Wonderful Counselor, everlasting Lord, Prince of Peace.

**Lord, we praise you!**

Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, our help and our refuge.

**Lord, we praise you!**

Jesus, God of peace, friend of all, source of life and of holiness.

**Lord, we praise you!**

Jesus, brother of the poor, goodness without measure, unending wisdom.

**Lord, we praise you!**

Jesus, good shepherd, true light, our way and our life.

**Lord, we praise you! Amen.**

**Prayer of Adoration and Invocation**

O Immanuel,  
O Wisdom from on high,  
O Lord of might,  
O Branch of Jesse's stem,  
O Key of David,

O Bright and Morning Star,  
 O King of nations,  
 We rejoice and are glad  
 on this bright Christmas morning,  
 for truly you have come,  
 full of grace and truth.  
 Even now, come into our hearts again.  
 Show us the path of knowledge.  
 Comfort us in our mourning.  
 Save us from our sin.  
 Open wide our way to heaven.  
 Turn our darkness into light.  
 End our sad divisions  
 and be our King of peace,  
 so that every creature in heaven and on earth  
 will join in a chorus of praise,  
 and shout with joy to you, our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Advent Candle Lighting**

#### **(Love) Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year C December 22, 2024**

Reader: As we light the fourth candle, we recall our journey thus far. Our hopeful longing led to our faith in the Light of the World: our savior, Jesus. In the birth of this baby, we find the joy of new life. Now, we celebrate the peace and rest we find in Jesus.

**Our peace remains throughout each trial because our hope rests in a love that lasts forever. We know what love is because God has loved us, sending his son to live among us. God's love is our peace.**

Reader: This love compels a response. We have seen the promise of peace in the child of Bethlehem. We have seen our God reward the humble and exalt the weak.

**God, we respond to your invitation. God, we open our hearts to your gift of grace. Meet us in our weakness and our humility and be our strength. Make us new and fill us with the peace that rests in your love which lasts forever and ever.**

*Light the fourth candle of the Advent wreath.*

### **Children's Hymn**

#### **Call to Confession**

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

**Prayer of Confession**

O God, in the beginning you spoke,  
 and creation was born, the object of your loving care.  
 In the fullness of time you spoke,  
 and the Word became flesh, Jesus, gift of your love.  
 We wonder at the miracle of creation;  
 we stand in awe before the mystery of the incarnation.  
 Forgive us earthbound creatures, feeble in faith,  
 empty of hope, lacking in love.  
 This year let the miracle and mystery of Christmas happen for us again.  
 We wait upon you with ready hearts, O God,  
 through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Assurance of Pardon**

Hear the good news!  
 There is no condemnation  
 for those who are in Christ Jesus.  
 For the law of the Spirit  
 of life in Christ Jesus  
 has set you free from the law of sin and death.  
 Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.  
 The old life has gone;  
 a new life has begun.  
 Know that in Jesus,  
 God embraces you, forgives you,  
 and strengthens you to live a renewed life.  
 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.

**Hymn #159: "Oh Come All Ye Faithful" (V 1,2,5)**

Oh come, all ye faithful,  
 joyful and triumphant;  
 oh come ye, oh come ye  
 to Bethlehem.  
 Come and behold him,  
 born the King of angels:

(Refrain)

Oh come, let us adore him;  
oh come, let us adore him;  
oh come, let us adore him,  
Christ the Lord.

God of God, Light of light,  
born unto Mary, the virgin blest,  
very God, begotten, not created: (Refrain)

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,  
born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to thee be  
glory given;  
Word of the Father,  
now in flesh appearing: (Refrain)

### **Responsive Reading**

#### **Psalm 80:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock.  
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.

<sup>2</sup> Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,  
stir up your might  
and come to save us!

<sup>3</sup> **Restore us, O God;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved!**

<sup>4</sup> O Lord God of hosts,  
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

<sup>5</sup> **You have fed them with the bread of tears  
and given them tears to drink in full measure.**

<sup>6</sup> **You make us an object of contention for our neighbors,  
and our enemies laugh among themselves.**

<sup>7</sup> **Restore us, O God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved!**

**Anthem (Music Ministry): "Gloria In Excelsis Deo"**

**Prayer for illumination**  
**(Congregant Prepared)**

## Scripture

### Micah 5:2

<sup>2</sup> But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
whose coming forth is from of old,  
from ancient days.

## Sermon

The last Sunday before Christmas, the fourth week of Advent, the last great reminder of the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah. This is usually one of the best attended services, the only ones better attended are Christmas Eve, mostly because the kids are on vacation and people have travelled back to spend the Christmas Holiday with family and friends, and grandma makes everyone come on Christmas Eve.

Which is why this is the weekend that most churches that have a full Sunday school try to find a way to put a show or play on by the Sunday school.

Most of us have probably seen or been in a wide variety of Christmas plays and pageants throughout our lifetime. Christmas pageants are special because we get to see all the little one's struggle with their lines or trip over the bathrobe that they have cinched way up at the waist so they can appear like a shepherd. We love the chaos of forgotten lines and mistimed entrance, of little ones singing off key or the wrong words, and the sight of the angels with crooked halos that are just barely holding together.

Many of us have probably seen the major productions of Christmas plays as well, The Church on the Queensway in Toronto, usually has Christmas and Easter plays that are big productions, with thousands of dollars spent on the set, the costumes, or the production.

Or maybe you have been lucky enough to go down to Sight and Sound and see one of their professional quality productions, with live animals, professional lighting, and perfect sound quality.

Whatever your preference, the truth is that they are all good in their own ways. Each one serves a purpose and tells a slightly different story to an audience that is willing to pay attention.

And if we were to sit down and analyze the first Christmas, the day of the birth of our Lord and Saviour we would probably find elements of all three versions of this play took place, there were some things that were professional and perfect, others were done well for the season, and there was most definitely a little bit of chaos, at least in the eyes of Joseph and Mary on that day.

However, from the most important details of that day down to the completely insignificant details that day, God had a plan and it was being put into action. God the father himself was the director, and he had coordinated the innocent and the majestic, the humble and the proud, the uneducated and the scholar, good and evil in a very diverse cast of characters taking part in the true story of the very first Christmas. Shakespear once said that ‘all the world’s a stage, and all men and women merely players.,’ so let’s examine the players that God had selected to fulfil his promise to his people.

We will begin with Mary, a young Jewish woman who is pledged to marry Joseph. She is a faithful follower of God and finds herself visited by an Angel of the Lord, but not just any angel it is the angel, Gabriel. Gabriel tells her that she will become pregnant and have a son whom she will name Jesus. As you can imagine this confused young Mary, after all she was still a virgin and still unmarried.

**Luke 1:34-35**

**<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”**

**<sup>35</sup> And the angel answered her, “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 called holy—the Son of God.**

We need to remember something at this point. Mary is not yet married and under Jewish law of the time she can be stoned to death for being pregnant outside of marriage. She is also probably wondering how her betrothed Joseph will react once he discovers that she is with a child, yet it seems that neither of these worries prevents her from doing what the Lord has asked her to do.

**Luke 1:38**

**<sup>38</sup> And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.**

After travelling to Bethlehem while heavy with child. Mary will end up giving birth to Jesus in a manger, because there was no room for Joseph or herself at any of the lodging places in Bethlehem.

Next, we have Joseph, a righteous and upstanding man who was pledged to be Mary’s husband. Upon discovering that Mary is pregnant he decides that the best course of action is to quietly divorce her. This is because under Jewish law the promise to marry was a legally binding promise, so to break it a divorce was required, and Joseph wants to do this secretly so as to not embarrass her or cause her undue attention. This is actually a big indicator of the type of man that Joseph was, imagine how he felt when he discovered the woman he had promised to marry, the woman that the whole town believed was a pure and godly woman was pregnant. And before he can follow through with his decision to divorce, an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream.

**Matthew 1:20-25**

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Joseph stayed with her, as her husband, and did not consummate the marriage until after the child was born, fulfilling one of the prophecies that foretold of the coming Messiah in the book of Isaiah.

Now one of the men who played a very important role in the whole story, but somehow never makes it to the stage in the Christmas pageant at most churches is Caesar Augustus. He is the Roman emperor who issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman Empire, and that each man is required to register in the place of their birth. It was Caesar Augustus's call for a census that forces Joseph to take his very pregnant wife from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the city of David, Bethlehem, in Judea. Which fulfills the prophecy that we read in today's Scripture:

**Micah 5:2**

<sup>2</sup> But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
whose coming forth is from of old,  
from ancient days.

Now we get into some of the secondary characters, like the shepherds. There were generally hard-working men, usually not well off and not well educated. They did what they did every night, looking after their sheep. It was most likely near the end of lambing season which is why there were more than a few out in the field that night. They were looking after the sheep as they gave birth and protecting them from the predators who were looking for an easy meal. However, God, has other plans for these men this night.

**Luke 2:8-14**

**8** And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the

Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

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

So, they set off to the town of Bethlehem and they find Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus in the manger just as they had been told by the angel.

#### **Luke 2: 16-20**

<sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

We often skip over this part, but we need to remember these men who would have been deemed unworthy of entering into the presence of the King were some of the first people to see God in the flesh, and having been blessed they went back to work, and they spent the rest of their days glorifying and praising God for all that they had seen.

Then we have the Magi, the wise men, astronomers for the East. They have seen a great star in the sky and travelled a great distance to find and worship this newborn King. Along their route they end up speaking with Herod, the King of the region, who is worried by this message of the King of the Jews being born in a region that he claims rulership over. After leaving King Herod's household they went and found Jesus, whom they bowed down and worshiped. And after recognizing him as King, they opened up the treasure that they had brought with them and presented Him with precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then having been warned in a dream to not return home through the Kingdom of Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

Which brings us to Herod, or as he liked to be known, Herod the great. The so-called king of the Jews. Herod's rulership was put into question when the Magi appeared in his court. If the prophesied King of the Jews is born, his influence, wealth and power are threatened, and he is enjoying his life. Herod will do anything to protect his rulership, in fact he has already had many of his close relatives killed because they are a threat to his influence, wealth and power. In fact, Caesar Augustus, who had placed his friend Herod as the king over the Jews once said that he, 'would rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son!' because it was a safer life. This is why Herod lies to the Magi; this is why he wants them to come back to him after they have found the baby and let him know where the baby was so that he could go and worship him as well. Of course,



we know his real plan was to eliminate the threat to his rulership, and it is made clear when the Magi do not return, and his solution is to have all Jewish boys under the age of 2 killed who were born in the area of Bethlehem.

Then we have the chief priests and teachers of the law. All of the Jewish scholars, theologians and religious leaders that were in the region at the time of Jesus's birth. These are the men that Herod turns to when the Magi do not return to inform him of Jesus's location. He turns to the people who are expected to know all of the prophecies and teachings of the Scripture. They should know the time and location of the Messiah's birth. They too are like Herod, comfortable in their position, they enjoy their influence, power and wealth, and a new king is just as bad for them as it is for Herod. However, they do not know the answers to the prophecy and cannot help Herod. However, there is a point that is often missed with these men, even though they are meant to be men of God, the Scripture does not record any of them putting in any effort to find the Messiah. In fact, the only time we will see the majority of these men in the New Testament is when they are opposing Jesus Christ, and when they take part in his trial and crucifixion thirty years later.

Next, we have two often-looked characters, Simeon, and Anna.

Simeon is a righteous and devote Jew, who had been led by the Holy Spirit to know that he will not die until he has laid eyes upon the Messiah. On the day that Joseph and Mary bring Jesus to the temple to be dedicated to God he is moved by the Holy Spirit

**Luke 2:27-32**

**<sup>27</sup> And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,**

**<sup>29</sup> "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;**

**<sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation**

**<sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,**

**<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."**

Then we have Anna, an elderly and devote prophetess. She had been widowed many years ago since the death of her husband she had been in the temple day and night fasting and in worship and prayer. She was devote and she too had been drawn to the temple that day because of the Holy Spirit. She too recognized the Christ. She praised God, gave thanks to God, and testified of the Holy babe that had been in the temple that day. She spoke to any who would listen to her, all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem by the Messiah.

Finally, we have the reason for the season, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Son of Man.

**John 1:1-2****1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.****<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.****John 1:14****<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

Jesus Christ willingly gave up the majesty and glory that he had in Heaven. He humbled himself, and was born as a baby in a stable, in a place where he was surrounded by the smell of animals. The first people to witness his birth were men who had no real power in this world. He lived as you and I live, he got hungry and thirsty, he got hot and cold, the same way as you and I. He even got tired, sore, and experienced the whole array of human emotion. As he grew up, he was tempted to do things that went against the Word of God, very much in the same way as you and I are tempted each and every day, yet he did not give into that temptation, not even once.

Then at the exact time that God had determined, at the exact moment that had been prophesied, he was arrested, ridiculed, tortured, and crucified upon a Roman cross at the bequest of the chief priests and teachers of the law. The Jews of his day had intentionally and wrongfully condemned him to death. Yes, it was the Romans who had carried out the crucifixion, but it was our sins – theirs, yours, and mine – that fashioned the nails that held him to that cross. And that is where the play would end, the final curtain would drop, Jesus Christ, the Messiah had died.

However, the story does not end there. For three days there was nothing, Jesus's followers were dealing with the shock, the chief priests, and teachers of the law, relaxed believing that their position in society was secured, the devil was celebrating his victory over God, after all, God had been slain by man.

Then, as God had planned, Jesus Christ rose from the grave. He defeated death, he defeated the devil, he rose to life and after forty days he ascended into heaven where he is seated at the right hand of the Father. A place from where he will judge mankind at the end of time.

You see the play is not over, the final curtain has not dropped, we are living out our lives on that same stage, one that started in the garden of Eden and one that does not end until the second coming of Jesus Christ has taken place, one that does not end until the final judgement has taken place and all of mankind has found their eternity in the New Jerusalem or the Lake of Fire.

Advent is the season that we remember our place in this play. We are living out our days between the time of the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah. The only way to reach the Kingdom of Heaven is by humbling ourselves and following Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.

So, I urge you all, live for Christ not just now in the season of Advent but every day of your life. Anticipate spending eternity with Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven, do not get caught up in this world, but focus on the next. Yes, Celebrate the first coming, but look forward to the second coming. Live as the Salt and Light of God's Word.

Let us pray,

Merciful God, loving Father,  
we give you thanks and praise  
that you have mercifully fulfilled  
the word of your promise to the patriarchs  
and sent your only Son  
to become truly human  
for our salvation and blessedness.

O Lord Jesus Christ,  
eternal praise be to you,  
that you, being rich, for our sakes became poor,  
that we through your poverty might become rich;  
that you have become our brother,  
that we with you might become the children of God.  
Grant that you may be born in our hearts,  
just as you, though you are Lord of lords,  
have for our sakes become a child,  
so, give us the right childlike mind.  
You are the brightness of the Father's glory  
and image of his person,  
renew us in your holy likeness.

Heavenly Light,  
lighten us through the darkness of this world.  
Eternal Life, give us life in you.  
Great Prince of Peace, grant us your peace,  
and keep us ever in your kingdom,  
that we may praise and magnify you in your glory:  
you, with the Father and the Holy Spirit live and reign forever.  
**Amen.**

***Source: Freely modified from The Swedish Rite: a translation of "Handbok för svenska kyrkan" by Eric Esskildsen Yelverton, 1921,***

**Hymn #149: “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 bright sky looked down where he lay,  
 the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
 but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.  
 I love you, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,  
 and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

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

**Invitation to Offering****Offering****Offertory Prayer****(Congregant Prepared)****Closing Hymn #139: “Hark The Herald Angels Sing”**

Hark! the herald angels sing  
 glory to the newborn King,  
 peace on earth and mercy mild,  
 God and sinners reconciled.  
 Joyful, all ye nations, rise;  
 join the triumph of the skies;  
 with the angelic host proclaim,  
 'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'

Refrain:

Hark! the herald angels sing  
 glory to the newborn King.

Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
 Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
 late in time behold him come,  
 offspring of a virgin's womb.  
 Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!

Hail the incarnate deity!  
 Pleased on earth with us to dwell,  
 Jesus, our Emmanuel.

Hail the heavenborn Prince of Peace!  
 Hail the sun of righteous ness!  
 Light and life to all he brings,  
 risen with healing in his wings.  
 Mild, he lays his glory by,  
 born that we no more may die,  
 born to raise the lost of earth,  
 born to give us second birth.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

Amazing God! We adore you and we praise you.  
 We bring our praises in the name of Jesus Christ,  
 your Son, our Lord.

We praise you for the way he demonstrated your merciful love  
 and your gentle touch upon our lives.  
 We praise you for his coming as light for all your people  
 of every age and in every place.  
 We praise you for his coming to set us free,  
 to open blind eyes, and to heal broken hearts and lives.  
 We praise you for his readiness to enter into  
 all that life in this world means to us, that we might,  
 by your grace, share all that heaven is in him.  
 We praise you for the way he identified himself with us.  
 He entered into our pain, our rejection,  
 our sorrow, our hopes,  
 and through his baptism, he even tasted  
 the results and effects of our sinfulness.  
 We praise you for accepting his sacrifice on the cross  
 as the price of the healing of our relationship with you.  
 We praise you more that through his resurrection  
 he has guaranteed our share in his eternal kingdom.  
 Lord, our praises are limited by time and space  
 and by our human weakness.  
 By your grace, enable us and empower us  
 that we shall be with you and praise you for ever in Christ.  
**Amen.**

**Benediction**

The joy of the angels,  
the eagerness of the shepherds,  
the perseverance of the Magi,  
the obedience of Joseph and Mary,  
and the peace of the Christ child be yours this Christmas.  
And the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
be upon you and remain with you always. **Amen.**