

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, December 8th, 2024
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Articles of Faith
Second Sunday of Advent
Malachi 3:1-2

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

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 Adoration and 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.**

Advent Candle Lighting

(Faith) Second Sunday of Advent, Year C December 8, 2024

Reader: Today we continue our journey towards Christmas, steadily moving closer to birth of the Christ child, the source of our hope and the subject of our deep longings. In Christ we place our faith

The second candle is a candle of faith. Our faith shines brightly in the midst of the darkness of our doubt. Our faith affirms that in the middle of our wondering, our questioning, God's love for us is constant.

Reader: God loved us enough to send his one and only son, born to us, the Savior of the world! God's initiative in seeking us out in love, finds us, refines us, as makes our doubts and fears the fertile soil in which our faith grows.

Jesus, your grace extends to meet us wherever we are today. Thank you. We trust in you, and in your love our faith is secure.

Light the second 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

Prayer of Confession

O promised Christ:

We are a world at war.

Our peace depends on your coming.

We are a sinful people.

Our pardon depends on your coming.

We are full of good intentions but weak at keeping promises;

our only hope of doing God's will

is that you should come and help us do it.

Lord Christ, Word made flesh,

our world waits

for your peace,

for your pardon,

and for your grace.

Even so: come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Almighty God, by whose providence

our Savior, Jesus Christ, came among us in great humility,
will sanctify you with the light of his blessing and set you free from all sin

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 #141: "Good Christians, All Rejoice"

Good Christians, all rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;

Now give heed to what we say:
Jesus Christ is born today,
ox and ass before him bow,
and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today;
Christ is born today.

Now you hear of endless bliss:
Jesus Christ was born for this.
He has opened heaven's door,
and we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this;
Christ was born for this.

Now you need not fear the grave:
Jesus Christ was born to save,
calls you one and calls you all
to gain the everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save;
Christ was born to save.

Responsive Reading

Psalms 25:1-10

¹To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
²**O my God, in you I trust;
let me not be put to shame;
let not my enemies exult over me.**

³ Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴ **Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.**

⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.

⁶ **Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.**

⁷ Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!

⁸ **Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.**

⁹ He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰ **All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.**

Anthem (Music Ministry): My Soul Doth Magnify The Lord

**Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)**

Scripture

Malachi 3:1-2

³ “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap.

Sermon

Today we celebrate the second week of Advent. Advent refers to the time when we are meant to be celebrating the coming or arrival of our Lord and Savior. As we talked about last week it is the countdown of anticipation that the people of Israel took part in as they awaited the first

coming of Jesus Christ, a time when our Lord and Savior became flesh in this world roughly 2000 years ago.

The Scripture from Malachi we read this morning tells us of the coming of the King and how God is sending a messenger to prepare the way. He sent many messengers in the way of his prophets in throughout the Old Testament, and we celebrate the season of Advent now as a reminder to Christians of the prophets that came to the Israelites reminding them of God's promise to his people.

Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, anticipation and longing. It was a time of crying out for salvation by those who were experiencing injustice in the world, those who were suffering under the curse of sin, those who were hoping for deliverance from this world by a God who keeps his promises. Advent for us is also meant to be a season of hope and anticipation, a time when we await the second coming of Jesus Christ, the return of the King who will rule in truth, justice and righteousness over his people and his creation. This is what Advent is meant to be about.

Advent is a celebration and a reminder for us of the truths of our faith, a time when we expectantly await the second coming of Jesus Christ and much of that celebration is celebrated symbolically in the traditions of the church. Many people in the modern world misunderstand the symbols of the Christmas season and attribute them to paganism or simple beauty. One of the most central symbols of the advent season is the advent wreath, at one time it was not just a symbol of the church but adorned the tables of the homes of the faithful. Yet it is a tradition that is lost to many church goers in the world today. So, as we celebrate the second week of Advent, let's do so by learning the meaning of the Advent wreath and how represents the season and the Scripture that points to the coming of our salvation.

The wreath itself is a circle, it has no beginning and no end. It is meant to be symbolic of God's timelessness. His eternal plan of salvation and his endless mercy.

Isaiah 9:7 states:

Isaiah 9:7

**⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.**

The wreath is also made of from the branches of an evergreen tree, symbolizing the hope of the newness of spring, the hope of renewal. It denotes the eternal life that we are granted when

we live in Christ. When the world is all dead in winter the evergreen stands a symbol of eternal life.

This comes from Isaiah as well:

Isaiah 35:4-7

⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart,

“Be strong; fear not!

Behold, your God

will come with vengeance,

with the recompense of God.

He will come and save you.”

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer,

and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,

and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,

and the thirsty ground springs of water;

in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,

the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

The symbolism does not end there, next we come to the candles. Three purple candles, purple which is the color of royalty, a color that is used to welcome the Advent, the coming of the king.

Zechariah 9:9-10

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, your king is coming to you;

righteous and having salvation is he,

humble and mounted on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

and the war horse from Jerusalem;

and the battle bow shall be cut off,

and he shall speak peace to the nations;

his rule shall be from sea to sea,

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

The four candles that sit around the central candle represent the 4 weeks of Advent. Hope, faith or peace, Joy and Love.

The first candle is traditionally the candle of Hope or Expectation, sometimes it is referred to as the candle of Prophecy, because it helps us recall the prophecies of the Old Testament about the coming of the Messiah. It is meant to remind us of the anticipation, the hope that the Israelites had in the coming of the Messiah, and the hope that we are meant to share in the second coming of the Messiah.

In the book of Romans Paul makes reference to this.

Romans 15:12-13

¹² And again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse will come,
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;
in him will the Gentiles hope.”

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Paul makes the reference to the hope we have in Jesus Christ regularly in his writings and the season of Advent is all about our hope in God’s salvation that comes through the Messiah, through Jesus Christ alone.

Part of this hope is revealed in the way that God sent prophets to his people throughout the Old Testament. Even when his people wandered away from faithfulness and fell into the ways of the world and pagan behavior. God did not leave them; he sent prophet after prophet to remind them of the coming of the Saviour. Isaiah is considered the primary prophet of hope in the season of Advent, and we have hope because of what God promised through his prophets. In chapter 40 alone he says:

Isaiah 40: 1-11

40 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the Lord’s hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,

for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

⁶ A voice says, “Cry!”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All flesh is grass,

and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades

when the breath of the Lord blows on it;

surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades,

but the word of our God will stand forever.

⁹ Go on up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good news;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good news;

lift it up, fear not;

say to the cities of Judah,

“Behold your God!”

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord God comes with might,

and his arm rules for him;

behold, his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd;

he will gather the lambs in his arms;

he will carry them in his bosom,

and gently lead those that are with young.

The second candle is the Bethlehem candle, it is often referred to as the candle of Faith or Peace that we get living in Christ Jesus as it reminds us of the journey and troubles that Mary and Joseph experienced in their journey to Bethlehem and the peace that the birth of Christ brought. When you have Jesus Christ in your life, you have the peace of the Lord in your life, the ways of this world, the suffering we endure, the trials, tribulations and troubles we go through are all bearable because of our faith and the peace it brings into our life.

We see this referenced by the prophet Micah and the wars that the people of Israel went to with the Assyrians, but it comes out most clearly in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶ For to us a child is born,

to us a son is given;

and the government shall be upon his shoulder,

and his name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace

there will be no end,
 on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 to establish it and to uphold it
 with justice and with righteousness
 from this time forth and forevermore.
 The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The third candle, which is the pink candle, is the Shepherd's candle often referred to as the candle of Joy. It is meant to remind us of the Joy that Mary experienced when the angel Gabriel appeared before her and told her that she would bear a special child, a child that would save and deliver his people. When the angel appears before the shepherds he says:

Luke 2:10-14

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!"

When Mary first met with Elizabeth, John the Baptist, still in the womb recognizes the Saviour and leapt with Joy.

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."

All as foretold by the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 12:3

³ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

The fourth candle is the Angel's candle often referred to as the candle of Love. It is meant to remind us of the message of God's love that is shared with us in the birth of our Lord and Saviour.

Isaiah 63:8-9

**⁸ For he said, "Surely they are my people,
children who will not deal falsely."**

And he became their Savior.

**⁹ In all their affliction he was afflicted,
and the angel of his presence saved them;
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.**

God sent his Son to save us, because of his love for us. He sent us the gift of our Messiah not because of anything we have done, but simply because of who he is and as a reminder that we are meant to live with that same love in this world.

1 John 4:7-12

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

With the reminders of the 4 outer candles we come to the central candle, the one that we light on Christmas Eve, the Christ Candle. Notice it is at the center of the wreath. It is at the center of the four exterior candles. It reminds us that Christ is the center, Christ is meant to be the heart of the season, the core focus, it is Christ who give light to the world. It is Christ who shines his light into the darkness and brings us to new life, it is Christ alone that gives us, hope, peace, faith, joy and love.

When we light the Christ candle on Christmas Eve it is a reminder that the Messiah has come once. He walked this world in the flesh among us and brought salvation to all who believe in him as Lord and Saviour.

It reminds us that God fulfilled his promises:

Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Matthew quotes this when the angel appears to Joseph:

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child

from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Our Messiah was indeed born, the Word made flesh. Jesus Christ walked among his people and shared the Good News of God's salvation, breaking bread with people who were lost in sin as an example for each of us as to how we are called to live.

The Advent wreath sits here as a reminder of God's promises to his people, of his fulfillment of that promise in the first coming of Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ came to this world as the 'lamb of God' to take away the sins of those who humbly accept him as Lord and repent and turn away from their sins as he willingly laid down his life upon the cross to pay the debt of our sinful lives.

However, it is also meant to be here as a reminder of his second coming. A time when he will not be coming as the "Lamb of God" but instead as the 'Lion of Judah' and at that time he will not be coming to forgive the sins of the world, but to exact God's righteous judgement on a rebellious and fallen world.

The Advent wreath sits here as a reminder of who God is and who our God has called us to be. Timothy himself said it wonderfully:

2 Timothy 1:8-14

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹ for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, ¹² which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. ¹³ Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

We are called to live as Christ's people in a world where we will be rejected, ridiculed and disrespected. We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, to look after the orphan and the widow, to speak the truth of God's Word even to ears who do not want to hear it. We are called to live as Christ's people in a world that goes against his teachings, as an example of what it means to be faithful to our King. Until his second coming as described in the book of Revelation

Revelation 19:11-16

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Advent wreath is a reminder for us all, that when Jesus Christ returns, some will rejoice, and others will fear.

Today's Scripture said:

Malachi 3:1-2

³ "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

On the day of his second coming who will be able to stand when he appears? Only those who know him as Lord, only those who know him as King of Kings. Only those who know him as their Messiah, their Saviour, only those who have humbled themselves before him, given their lives to him and repented of their sins so that they may be forgiven and receive eternal life in his Kingdom.

Let us pray,

The Holy Spirit

O Holy Spirit, Love of God,
pour out your grace,
and descend plentifully into my heart.
Enlighten the dark corners of this neglected dwelling,
and scatter there your cheerful beams.

Dwell in that soul that longs to be your temple.
 Water that barren soil, overrun with weeds and briars,
 and lost for lack of cultivating,
 and make it fruitful with your dew from heaven.
 Come, refreshment of those who languish and faint.
 Come, Star and Guide of those who sail in the tempestuous sea of the world. You are the only
 Haven of the tossed and shipwrecked.
 Come, Glory and Crown of the living, and only Safeguard of the dying.
 Come, Holy Spirit, in your great mercy, and make me fit to receive you. Amen.

Source: Augustine of Hippo, Fourth Century

Hymn #144: “’Twas In The Moon Of Wintertime”

'Twas in the moon of wintertime,
 when all the birds had fled,
 that mighty Gitchi Manitou
 sent angel choirs instead;
 before their light the stars grew dim,
 and wandering hunters heard the hymn:

Refrain:

Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born,
 In excelsis gloria.

Within a lodge of broken bark
 the tender Babe was found;
 a ragged robe of rabbit skin
 enwrapped his beauty round,
 but, as the hunter braves drew nigh,
 the angel song rang loud and high:

The earliest moon of wintertime
 is not so round and fair
 as was the ring of glory on
 the helpless infant there.
 The chiefs from far before him knelt
 with gifts of fox and beaver pelt.

Invitation to Offering

Offering**Offertory Prayer****(Congregant Prepared)****Closing Hymn #138: “While Shepherds Watched”**

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

'Fear not,' said he, for mighty dread
 had seized their troubled mind;
 'Glad tidings of great joy I bring
 to you, all human kind.

'To you, in David's town, this day
 is born of David's line
 a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord,
 and this shall be the sign:

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

Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
 appeared a shining throng
 of angels praising God, who thus
 addressed their joyful song:

'All glory be to God on high,
 and to the earth be peace,
 good will henceforth from heaven to earth
 begin, and never cease!'

Pastoral Prayer

O King of nations,
 your reign spreads through all the lands,
 you defend the cause of the poor
 and plead for the wretched of the earth.

Fashion us into an obedient people,
that we may spread the good news
of your reign of perfect peace and justice,
until all creation will finally rejoice in your perfect will,
until all bend the knee to the King of kings and Lord of lords,
in whose name we pray, even Jesus Christ, your Son, and our Savior. **Amen.**

Benediction

God the Father, who loved the world
so much that he sent his only Son,
give you grace to prepare for eternal life.
God the Son, who comes to us as Redeemer and Judge,
reveal to you the path from darkness to light.
God the Holy Spirit, by whose working
the virgin Mary conceived the Christ,
help you bear the fruits of holiness. **Amen.**