

Worship in the Home: Sunday, December 20, 2020

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Worship in the Home

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year B

December 20, 2020

In this time of world-wide crisis, congregations throughout this church are not able to gather for worship as the body of Christ. While you cannot be together in person, we can hear the word of God and hold each other in prayer. We offer this brief resource as an aid for prayer in the home. As with our prayers in the gathered assembly for worship, you are encouraged to prepare or adapt them locally for your context.

God keeps the promise made to David to give him an everlasting throne. The angel tells Mary that God will give David's throne to her son Jesus. She is perplexed by Gabriel's greeting and by the news of her coming pregnancy, but she is able still to say, "Count me in." We who know that Jesus is called king only as he is executed still find it a mystery hard to fathom, but with Mary today we hear the news of what God is up to and say, "Count us in."

Find a peaceful place to pray, perhaps a table. During this season, you may wish to include an advent wreath where you pray, and light four candles. You may light your Advent wreath each day this week. A prayer to use throughout the week appears at the end of this blog.

Then, one person may lead in this acclamation and then pray the Prayer of the Day.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Amen.

Let us pray.

A brief silence is kept before the prayer.

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Instead of David building a house (temple) for God, God promises to establish David's house (dynasty) forever. Centuries later, after the Babylonian exile, no king sat on the throne. Even then, however, the people of Israel remembered this promise and continued to hope for a king, the

messiah, God's anointed.

¹Now when David the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." ³Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Psalmody: Luke 1:46b-55

^{46b}My soul proclaims the greatness^l of the Lord,
⁴⁷my spirit rejoices in^l God my Savior,
⁴⁸for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your^l lowly servant.
From this day all generations will^l call me blessed:
⁴⁹you, the Almighty, have done great^l things for me
and holy^l is your name.
⁵⁰You have mercy on^l those who fear you,
from generation to^l generation.
⁵¹You have shown strength^l with your arm
and scattered the proud in^l their conceit,
⁵²casting down the mighty^l from their thrones
and lifting^l up the lowly.
⁵³You have filled the hungry^l with good things
and sent the rich^l away empty.
⁵⁴You have come to the aid of your^l servant Israel,
to remember the promise of mercy,
⁵⁵the promise made^l to our forbears,
to Abraham and his children forever.

Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27

Paul closes his letter to the Romans by praising God because, in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God has revealed the promised, divine plan of salvation for all humanity. Paul proclaims this gospel of Christ in order to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations.

²⁵Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever! Amen.

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

In this annunciation, Luke makes clear that God comes with good news for ordinary people from little known places. This king will not be born to royalty in a palace, but to common folk in a stall. Here Luke highlights the role of the Spirit, a special emphasis in this gospel.

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin woman engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And the angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by the angel's words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his dominion there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Reflection

Having read these readings, think on this:

"The Lord is with you," says Nathan to David. "The Lord is with you," says the angel to Mary. When we hear these readings today they say to us, "The Lord is with you." We have been and are afraid, especially now. Though we have heard promises about how kings and other rulers will do wonderful things, they have cruelly disappointed our hopes. "Do not be afraid," these readings say to us. The house that God builds is neither a royal temple nor a dynasty of kings, for the true king is not a king at all, but a child born among the poor who grows to become a crucified man and lives as Christ arisen. In the power of the Spirit, he is present now, making any place where his word is heard to be the house of God. That secret is now disclosed. We usually come to the house God builds when we gather with the assembly to hear the word and to receive Christ in the holy communion. But even in these days, God's word sounds in our homes and in our hearts. We become God's house, empowered to share Christ with our world. "The Lord is with you." Now. Listen to that word. With Mary, trust it. Say, "Let it be to me according to your word."

If you have a hymnal, you may now sing or read "Unexpected and Mysterious" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 258), "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 254), "Filled with Hope and Gratitude" (All Creation Sings 907, learn more about this adaption of the song of Mary in [this video](#)). Selected hymns are provided below for those without a hymnal at home.

[Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus](#)
[Filled with Hope and Gratitude](#)

Then pray these intercessions:

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, let us pray that God come quickly to this weary world, responding to each petition with the words, "Come and save us soon."

A brief silence.

O God, Emmanuel, we pray: be with us. Bless our national church and our own congregation. Bless also our neighbors of other denominations and faiths, that strengthened by your presence we may support one another in love and together serve those in need.

A brief silence.

Hear our prayer, O God:

Come and save us soon.

O God, the Wisdom of the world, as tomorrow the earth's north tilts back toward the sun, preserve vegetation and wild animals during winter. Form us into a people who honor your creation. Make of our decorated Christmas trees signs of our thankfulness for the earth.

A brief silence.

Hear our prayer, O God:

Come and save us soon.

O God, King of nations, bring peace and justice to the countries of the world. Lead the nations of the Middle East toward peace with one another and justice for the Palestinians. Guide our elected leaders toward honest and compassionate policies that serve all the people. Preserve our nation from discord and violence.

A brief silence.

Hear our prayer, O God:

Come and save us soon.

O God, Key of David, look with mercy on all who are locked into despair, who fear the darkness, who live brokenhearted. Open windows to those who are isolated. Abide with all who are incarcerated. Give shelter to the homeless and the refugees.

A brief silence.

Hear our prayer, O God:

Come and save us soon.

O God, Root of Jesse, nurture our community. Connect us with one another across all barriers, and bring an end to historic prejudices. Bless the work of food pantries and relief agencies, and inspire our holidays with your spirit of benevolence.

A brief silence.

Hear our prayer, O God:

Come and save us soon.

O God, Ruler of might, send your healing power to all in bodily need. Curb the coronavirus, and strengthen medical workers. For those with COVID-19 we pray: . . . Guide all world health organizations and governmental officials in the distribution of the vaccines, and calm the fears of those who are reluctant to receive the vaccine. Bring pregnant women to successful births. We pray especially for

A brief silence.

Hear our prayer, O God:

Come and save us soon.

O God, our Savior, dwell within us; make us your home, and receive the prayers of our hearts.

A longer time of silence.

Hear our prayer, O God:

Come and save us soon.

O God, Dayspring everlasting, we remember all who have died and now live in your light, especially Katharina von Bora Luther and those we name here before you: . . . Gather us to yourself, when we join with all the faithful of every time and land to sing Mary's hymn of praise.

A brief silence.

Hear our prayer, O God:

Come and save us soon.

We cannot thank you enough, O Emmanuel, for your ongoing presence among us. Remain with us, and receive our prayers, for the sake of the Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

If you have a hymnal, you may now sing or read "Joy to the World" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 267), "My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 251). Selected hymns are provided below for those without a hymnal at home.

[Joy to the World](#)

Then conclude with these prayers:

Let us pray.

A brief silence is kept before the prayer.

Holy God,
the Beginning and the Ending, our Hope as we wait,
we praise you for joining us to your people of old.
We bless you for your prophets who call us to righteousness
and promise a new earth with peace for all.
For the Word of your covenant, we thank you, O God.

We thank you, O God.

We praise you for the coming of Jesus our Lord,
who lifts up the lowly, heals the suffering world,
and proclaims your way of mercy and truth.
For your Word who is Christ, we magnify you, O God.

We magnify you, O God.

Send your Spirit on all who receive your Word.
Nurture our faith with your grace,
accompany us with your might,
and empower our zeal for your justice and joy.
For your Word through the church, we praise you, O God.

We praise you, O God.

All praise to you, holy God,
today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.

Amen.

Offering

Please remember to mail in your offerings so that Grace can continue to serve you.

Offering Prayer

Generous God, you have created all that is, and you provide for us in every season. Bless all that we offer, that through these gifts the world will receive your blessing. In the name of Jesus, Emmanuel, we pray. **Amen.**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Then speak the Blessing:

The Creator of the stars bless our Advent waiting,
the long-expected Savior fill us with love,
the unexpected Spirit guide our journey,
+ now and forever.

Amen.

Here is a brief prayer to use as you light four candles on the Advent wreath this coming week:

Blessed are you, O God. In Jesus you came to live among us. Give us hearts ready to welcome you when you come to us in friends, neighbors, and strangers.

Amen.

Devotional Music Links: For your individual or group devotion, you may choose to listen to the following choral recordings made available through Augsburg Fortress: "[As the Dark Awaits the Dawn](#);" "[Savior of the Nations Come: Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord](#);" "[O Savior of Our Fallen Race](#)."

Readings for the Week:

Monday Luke 1:46b-55. **Tuesday** Hebrews 8:1-13. **Wednesday** 1 Samuel 2:1-10. **Thursday** (Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Eve) Luke 2:1-15 [15-20]. **Friday** (Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Day) John 1:1-14. **Saturday** (Stephen, Deacon and Martyr) Acts 6:8 — 7:2a, 51-60. **First Sunday of Christmas** Isaiah 61:10 — 62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40.

Daily Prayer Resources are available, including simple forms of Morning, Evening, and Night Prayer; Responsive Prayer; and prayers for mealtimes and other occasions.

Due to copyright restrictions, we are only able to provide downloadable hymns that are in the public domain and selected hymns for limited use. Other suggestions provided above may be found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. To purchase copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and *All Creation Sings* for the home, visit the [Augsburg Fortress website](#) or call 1-800-328-4648. Selected hymns from *All Creation Sings* will be provided for limited use.

Reflection text: Gordon Lathrop. Intercessory Prayer: Gail Ramshaw

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Thank you to those who clean the Church following worship.

In House Church Services have been cancelled until further notice.

Please keep in your prayers this week: Kevin Johnson, Barbara Metzger, Rob Johnson and Steve Lindberg (Streeter Family Friend's & Kin), Noah Klenken (Fred Fixsen's Nephew), Cal Curtis & Patty Thompson (Carole Holten's Son-in-Law & Sister), Bill Warner, David Warner, Emily (Ben & Casey's Daughter), Terry Newgard, Judy Wings, Steve Murdock, Bob Broberg.

Pastor's Mid-week Devotion – December 16, 2020

Hope and Help

John the Baptist was in prison. Some time has passed since he baptized Jesus in the Jordan. Their fortunes have reversed. John, who had been so popular, is about to be martyred. Jesus, who had begun His ministry with His baptism at John's hand, is now the talk of the town. And John, writing from behind prison bars, sends a message to Jesus, "Are You the Expected One," he asks, "or shall we look for someone else?"

Now, you might say, "How can John ask such a question? Wasn't he there when the Spirit came down as a dove, and a voice came from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?" (Mt 3:17) Yes, he was. But there is no evidence that John saw the dove or heard the voice. Certainly, John knew Jesus was someone special. But the Messiah? The long-awaited One who would redeem Israel? John certainly wanted to believe it was true, but it was an enormous leap of faith.

For thousands of years, the Jewish People had been praying for a Messiah, a deliverer who would conquer their enemies and establish a kingdom of righteousness and might. Their deliverer would be powerful, a warrior and a king, and through his power the Jews would again reign in peace and prosperity. Then along comes Jesus, a poor carpenter with questionable friends. He claims to be

the long-awaited Messiah who has come to set up a very different kind of kingdom. And so, we can forgive even Jesus' strongest supporters for asking, "You're the answer to our prayers? Really?" In this respect, the world hasn't changed much since Jesus' day: we still respect appearances more than results. We still judge people based on how they look, rather than what's in their hearts. People in Jesus' time rejected Jesus because He didn't fit their expectations. Where was His horse? Where was His army? He didn't look like a mighty warrior.

Talent agent Robert Littman laughs as he recalls the day he rejected a young actor named Jack Nicholson. When Nicholson won the Academy Award for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, he went up to accept and said: "I want to thank that agent who many years ago advised me not to become an actor." Littman admits that during his career of twenty-five years, he also turned down the Beatles.

The people of Jesus' day had the opportunity of entering Christ's kingdom, but His appearance put them off. And there are many people who still reject Christ for the same reason. They see Christianity, the faith of Jesus, as something weak, impotent, a crutch for hurting people. All this talk about love, all these hymns about peace and goodwill for all people. This is not the language of our time. "Look out for #1. What's in it for me? Not in my backyard." This is the language of our society. Love, compassion, gentleness, respect – what have they to do with us?

When John the Baptist burst on the scene, he wasn't the people's ideal choice for a prophet, especially the modern incarnation of the prophet Elijah, who many people believed John to be. Still, even John had questions about Jesus. Was He really the One?

This was no idle question for John, John had risked his life to spread the message of repentance in anticipation of the coming Messiah. And now John was in prison. His passionate preaching made the local rulers uncomfortable; if John didn't tone it down, he was looking at an early grave, and he knew it. John's question to Jesus takes on a whole new meaning when we look at it in this light. "Are you the expected One," he asks, "or shall we look for someone else?" He might as well by saying, "Jesus, are you really the Messiah? Can I stake my life on you?" Because that's exactly what John was doing.

And that is still the question we are asking 2,000 years later: "Jesus, are you really the Messiah? Can I stake my life on you?"

John the Baptist probably knew he would not stick around for the "rest of the story." He would not live to see the Messiah triumph over Israel's enemies. He just needed to know that it was all worth it. He needed to know Jesus was the one.

It's interesting to note that Jesus never directly answered John's question: "Are you the chosen One or shall we look for someone else?" He never gave a straight "yes" or "no." Jesus could have pointed to hundreds of Biblical prophecies that His life had fulfilled. He could have performed some dazzling miracle that would have instantly silenced all of John's doubts. Instead, Jesus announced, "Go and tell John the things you hear and see: The blind see, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

Why did Jesus choose these particular things to prove his Lordship? What does this tell us about His priorities? These miracles all seem to involve restoration and compassion. Just as they are today, the deaf, blind, and lame were kept outside the mainstream of society. They were often forced to beg to support themselves. Others viewed their disability as punishment from God. Lepers were outcasts, unclean, cut off from all social or religious acceptance. Jesus didn't just heal these people – He restored their place in society. And Jesus' restorative powers were never on greater display than when He brought a dead person back to life. These answers demonstrate Jesus' compassion for the least and lowest. They remind us that Jesus came for the hurting, helpless, overlooked people of society.

That's always a good thing to remember at this time of the year when greed and materialism are given free reign. Don't confuse society's celebration of Christmas with the character of Jesus. These two are different as day and night.

Lieutenant Gerald Coffee spent seven years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. During his second Christmas in that rotten, hell-hole of a camp he made an amazing discovery. He had been stripped of everything by which he measured his identity: rank, uniform, family, money. And yet, alone in a

cramped 3' x 7' cell, he began to understand the significance of Christmas. Removed from all commercial distractions, he was able to focus on the simplicity of Christ's birth. Although he was lonely and afraid, he realized this Christmas could be his most meaningful, because now, more than ever before, he understood the event.

We can assume that John the Baptist discovered the same thing. As he sat in his prison cell, stripped of all things we think are necessary for life, he discovered the one most important thing: hope. John glimpsed hope that the Messiah had come to set up an eternal kingdom, a kingdom of justice and mercy and compassion and healing. A kingdom for all people. No, it wasn't exactly what the people were praying for. It was so much more than that. I pray this Christmas season you will discover that same hope for yourself.

Pastor Bill Sass