

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**FOURTH SUNDAY of ADVENT**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

*Lighting the Fourth Advent Candle*

God does not come from nowhere  
but through a people named Israel,  
a prophet named Nathan,  
a king named David,  
and a descendant of David named Jesus:

When King David had defeated his enemies  
he wanted to build a temple, as a house for God's presence,  
and consulted Nathan, who said,  
"Do whatever you have in mind."  
But God gave Nathan a different message  
about a different kind of house:

Down to this day I have never dwelt in a house  
since I brought Israel up out of Egypt.  
I lived in a tent and a tabernacle. . . .  
Your family and your kingdom  
will be established for ever in my sight.  
*(2 Sam. 7:6, 16 REB)*

Through an angel God speaks to Mary:  
You will conceive and give birth to a son,  
and you are to give him the name Jesus,  
God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; . . .  
his reign shall never end.  
*(Luke 1:31, 33b REB)*

Through Mary, God speaks to us:  
My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior,  
whose name is holy,

who has routed the proud and all their schemes,  
brought down monarchs from their thrones, . . .  
raised on high the lowly,  
filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

*(extracts from Luke 1:47–53 REB)*

We light our fourth candle,  
as a sign of God’s love,  
shining in the world  
through people past and present.

**Living God, thank you for coming to our world.  
Thank you for meeting us in real people,  
whose stories we can tell,  
and above all in Jesus.**

#### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: Immanuel:  
**All: God with us.**  
One: Incarnation:  
**All: God in the flesh.**  
One: Into this world...  
**All: ...God comes, with us, in us, for us.**  
One: Come, let us worship the God who comes.

#### **\*OPENING HYMN “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming” GtG 129 (verses 1-2)**

One: Lo, how a rose e’er blooming  
from tender stem hath sprung,  
**All: of Jesse’s lineage coming,  
by faithful prophets sung.**  
One: It came, a floweret bright,  
amid the cold of winter,  
**All: when half spent was the night.**  
  
One: Isaiah `twas foretold it,  
the rose I have in mind;  
**All: with Mary we behold it,  
the virgin mother kind.**  
One: To show God’s love aright  
she bore for us a Savior,  
**All: when half spent was the night.**

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**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**O God of compassion, have mercy upon us. You send forth your Spirit, yet we ignore your counsel. Christ dwells among us, yet we fail to obey him. We sing of peace on earth, yet hostility continues. Angels herald good tidings, yet we commit evil deeds. Forgive our deliberate and indirect misuse of your graciousness, and make us worthy to receive Christ in our lives. Amen.**

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from Matthew 1, Luke 2, & John 3)*

**One:** In this is love, that God gives us the gift of Jesus Christ to remind us of the truth of Immanuel: that God is with us.

**All:** **The Good News is this: “God loved the world so much that God gave God’s only Son.” This is indeed “good news of great joy for all the people.”**

**One:** So rejoice and be glad, for in Jesus Christ we are loved, in Jesus Christ we are embraced, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

**All:** **“Glory to God in the highest heaven!”**

**\*THE PEACE**

**One:** The peace of Christ be with you.

**All:** **And also with you.**

*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)*

**THE WORD**

**SCRIPTURE READINGS** II Samuel 7:1-11,16

Luke 1:26-38

II Samuel 7:1-11,16 (New Revised Standard Version)

*1 Now when the king was settled in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 the 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.” 3 Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.”*

*4 But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: 5 Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 6 I 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. 7 Wherever 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?” 8 Now 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; 9 and 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. 10 And 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, 11 from 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 ... 16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.*

Luke 1:26-38 (New Revised Standard Version+)

*26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And the angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He 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. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have never slept with a man?" 35 The 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. 36 And 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. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 Then 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.*

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** by Pastor Bill Vincent

I have to confess: I played hookie Thursday morning.

Many of you know the friends we are staying with are building a duplex that we will be moving into soon enough. It has been exciting watching the building and seeing the progress. At the beginning of this week, the outside walls were up and the inside walls were framed, and the construction stood like a box opened up to the sky.

And then the crane came Thursday. And it lifted up the first rafters and gently laid them into the waiting hands of those who positioned the rafters just so and nailed them into place. "Look! There go some other rafters, partially put together. Where do they go? Oh, of course, right there!" And on and on, each piece fitting into its place, until, by the end of the day, all the rafters were in place and it was really beginning to look like a house.

David wants to build a house for God. A noble sentiment.

But God turns that around and says, “I will make you a house.” The Davidic line. The Davidic dynasty (and legacy).

Of course, time would tell that this dynasty would be sketchy at times, with the ‘characters’ who would follow David, many of them not at all living up to his standards.

Until years – centuries – later, when a woman named Mary is engaged to a man named Joseph, “*of the house of David.*”

And the child born would fulfill that long-ago promise more than anyone dared imagine.

And I wonder: Could it be that those of us who seek to follow this One born in Bethlehem – that we are the ‘house’ that God is making for David?

Years later, Paul would describe his followers – us – as “*the body of Christ*” (I Corinthians 12:27). A familiar image: “the body of Christ,” embracing Christ’s body of work and ministry.

And earlier in that same letter, Paul said “*You are God’s building*” (I Corinthians 3:9).

We are God’s building.

We are Christ’s body.

We are David’s ‘house’.

That’s who we are, we who seek to follow this One who is the very embodiment of God.

“*How can this be...?*” we echo Mary: we who are ‘virgin’ in this life before God; we who are so often barren in our attempts at faithfulness.

How can this be?

“*The Holy Spirit will come upon you*” (v.35), is the response – and the promise.

Oh well, now that you say it like that...

...I still don’t get it.

Fair enough.

It’s scary to be invited to participate in this incarnation – this enfleshment – of the divine, this God-bearing to the world.

We have questions.

We have doubts.

So did Mary.

She was perplexed.

She pondered.

And she certainly continued to ponder and wonder even after the birth.

But she also took the plunge and stepped out in faith, engaging the response – and the promise:

“*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*”

We too, as we struggle with our response, need to remember this word.

“Your word” – as Mary says it – the angel’s word, God’s word: which earlier had pledged to build David a house.

“Your word,” the angel’s word, God’s word: which has identified Mary as “*favored*” – ‘graced’ – and calls us Christ’s body, God’s building, and even David’s ‘house’.

“Your word,” the angel’s word, God’s word: which has been faithful in the past and will be faithful – and fruitful – in the present and the future, and in our lives as well.

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; (says the Lord)  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

(Isaiah 55:10-11)

God’s word: true, powerful, faithful.

And part of the assurance of that word – for Mary, and for us – is

*“For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

One possible translation for the Greek is, “For no word from God will be impossible.”

This word which makes the barren alive and the virgin possible.

This word says

You are Christ’s body.

You are God’s building.

You are David’s house.

A house for the world.

A place to shelter and protect, to house and hold, to embrace and include.

A community to be the presence and arms of God’s love.

John Bell wrote a hymn describing Mary’s encounter –

**just an angel and a woman  
and a voice in her ear.**

– where Mary hears the call,

**“you are requested  
to mother God’s Son.”**

Perplexed? She was.

Uncertain? She was.

“Yet Mary,” writes Bell,

**Yet Mary, consenting to what  
none could guess,  
replied with conviction,  
“Tell God I say, Yes.”**

(John L. Bell, “No Wind at the Window” 1992; found in *Glory to God* #101)

This year – and every year, if truth be told – God invites us to be a part of the gift of Christmas:

- to be a part of the building of David's house,
- to be a part of the incarnating of God's presence,
- to be a part of the body of Christ and his body of work and service.

We are invited to be part of this wondrous gift of Christmas every day of the year.  
Will we say 'Yes'?

### **\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,**

**everywhere the giver and renewer of life.**

**The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,  
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,  
and binds us together with all believers  
in the one body of Christ, the Church.**

**The same Spirit**

**who inspired the prophets and apostles  
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,  
engages us through the Word proclaimed,  
claims us in the waters of baptism,  
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,  
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.**

**In a broken and fearful world**

**the Spirit gives us courage  
to pray without ceasing,  
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,  
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,  
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,  
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.**

**In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,**

**we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks  
and to live holy and joyful lives,  
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,  
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**Pastor:** Most High God, Immanuel...

**People:** ...we are your servants.

**THE LORD'S PRAYER** *(Traditional)*

**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 evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
forever. Amen.**

**OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Source of light and unexpected life, thank you for sending Christ into our midst to provide for us in our needs and guide us in our lives. Use what we offer, to enlighten all people to the truth of his coming, and bless all our endeavors as we seek faithfully in Christ's name to do your will. Amen.**

**SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** "Love Has Come" GtG 110

One: Love has come:

**All: a light in the darkness!**

One: Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.

**All: See, all heaven has come to proclaim it;  
hear how their song of joy arises:**

One: Love! Love!

**All: Born unto you, a Savior!**

One: Love! Love!

**All: Glory to God on high.**

One: Love is born! Come, share in the wonder.

**All: Love is God now asleep in the hay.**

One: See the glow in the eyes of his mother;  
what is the name her heart is saying?



**All: Love! Love!**

One: Love is the name she whispers.

**All: Love! Love!**

One: Jesus,

**All: Emmanuel.**

One: Love has come and never will leave us!

**All: Love is life everlasting and free.**

One: Love is Jesus within and among us.

**All: Love is the peace our hearts are seeking.**

One: Love! Love!

**All: Love is the gift of Christmas.**

One: Love! Love!

**All: Praise to you, God on high!**

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#### **\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

**People: ...Amen.**

#### **POSTLUDE**

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