

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FOURTH SUNDAY of ADVENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 103)*

One: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all God's benefits --"
All: "who forgives all your iniquity,"
One: "who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy."
All: Our spirits rejoice in the coming of God our Savior.
One: God's mercy extends from generation to generation.
All: So come, let us worship the Lord our God!

***OPENING HYMN** "Blest Be the God of Israel" GtG 109

One: Blest be the God of Israel,
**All: who comes to set us free;
who visits and redeems us,
who grants us liberty.**

One: The prophets spoke of mercy,
of freedom and release;
**All: God shall fulfill that promise
and bring the people peace.**

One: God from the house of David
a child of grace has given;
**All: a Savior comes among us
to raise us up to heaven.**

One: Before him goes the herald,
forerunner in the way,
**All: the prophet of salvation,
the harbinger of day.**

One: On those who sit in darkness
the sun begins to rise,
**All: the dawning of forgiveness
upon the sinner's eyes.**
One: God guides the feet of pilgrims
along the paths of peace.
**All: O bless our God and Savior
with songs that never cease!**

Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Trusting in your grace,
we make our confession to you, O Lord;
for against you, and you alone, we have sinned,
when we are so full of ourselves that we cannot see the error of our ways.
We abuse our power and abuse one another.
We condemn one another and condone what we know to be wrong.
We are so focused on the mistakes of others,
that we are blind to our own.
We are so consumed by what we want,
that we do not consider the common good.
Forgive us, gracious and merciful God.
Transform our ways as a mirror of your generosity.
Renew our hearts as vessels of your love.
Instill our lives with the life of your Son,
born in our midst,
Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from Matthew 1 & Luke 2)*

One: The One who comes in the Child of Bethlehem is the One who comes to
redeem and restore.
All: His name is Jesus, "for he will save his people from their sins."
One: This is indeed "good news of great joy for all the people."
**All: So let us rejoice and be glad, for in Jesus Christ we are forgiven and
loved! "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 READING II Samuel 11:1-12:25 (selected verses)

II SAMUEL 11:1-12:25 (selected verses) (Common English Bible+)

^{11:2} *One evening, David got up from his couch and was pacing back and forth on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful.* ³ *David sent someone and inquired about the woman. The report came back: "Is this not Eliam's daughter Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"* ⁴ *So David sent messengers to take her. When she came to him, he had sex with her. (Now she had been purifying herself after her monthly period.) Then she returned home.* ⁵ *The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."*

...
²⁶ *When Uriah's wife heard that her husband Uriah was dead, she mourned for her husband.* ²⁷ *After the time of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her back to his house. She became his wife and bore him a son.*

But what David had done was evil in the Lord's eyes.

...
^{12:7} *"You are that man!" Nathan told David. "This is what the Lord God of Israel says: I anointed you king over Israel and delivered you from Saul's power.* ⁸ *I gave your master's house to you, and gave his wives into your embrace. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. If that was too little, I would have given even more.* ⁹ *Why have you despised the Lord's word by doing what is evil in the Lord's eyes? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and taken his wife as your own. You used the Ammonites to kill him.* ¹⁰ *Because of that, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite as your own, the sword will never leave your own house.*

¹¹ *"This is what the Lord says: I am making trouble come against you from inside your own family. Before your very eyes I will take your wives away and give them to your friend, and he will have sex with your wives in broad daylight.* ¹² *You did what you did secretly, but I will do what I am doing before all Israel in the light of day."*

¹³ *"I have sinned against the Lord!" David said to Nathan.*

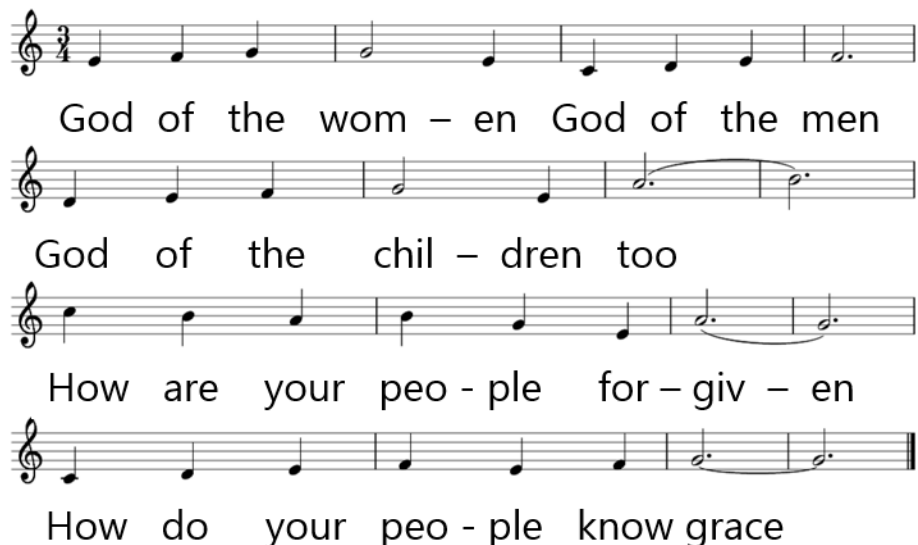
"The Lord has removed your sin," Nathan replied to David. "You will not die. ¹⁴ *However, because you have shown such contempt for the Lord by doing this, the son born to you will die."* ¹⁵ *Then Nathan went home.*

The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne for David, and he became very sick. ...

...
²⁴ *Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba. He went to her and had sex with her. She gave birth to a son and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him* ²⁵ *and sent word by the prophet Nathan to name him Jedidiah because of the Lord.*

THE ADVENT WREATH (Mothers of Messiah): Bathsheba

("Mothers of Messiah" by Tracy Sybesma. From *Reformed Worship 85* © September 2007
Worship Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. Used by permission.)



God of the wom – en God of the men
God of the chil – dren too
How are your peo - ple for – giv – en
How do your peo - ple know grace

*ROEDER (God of the Sparrow), Tune by Carl Schalk.
Copyright 1983, GIA Publications, Inc., All rights reserved.
Reprinted / Podcast / Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE
#A-739819/#A-739796. All rights reserved.*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Birth of Grace and Forgiveness" by Pastor Bill Vincent

As Matthew shares the genealogy of Jesus, mentioning several women along the way, the most notable thing about Bathsheba is that her name is never used. She is simply "the wife of Uriah."

Perhaps this is the ultimate scandal, breaking 3 of the 10 Commandments: covetousness, adultery, and murder.

Now Tamar had sex with her father-in-law, though that very father-in-law is the one who names her more righteous than he.

Rahab had sex with...who knows who.

Ruth was 'simply' a foreigner, and a despised one at that.

But Bathsheba – 'she who must not be named' – is "the wife of Uriah."

In truth, those words damn David as much, if not more so, than Bathsheba.

David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah. (Matthew 1:6 NRSV)

David had a son...by another man's wife. That's the scandal.

And some would try to blame Bathsheba for that scandal, painting her as a seductive temptress.

And some would try to paint her as a victim – victim to the power and manipulations of the king himself, David, who comes off as not necessarily the sweet, lyre-strumming shepherd we are prone to imagine.

“What David had done was evil in the Lord’s eyes.” What David had done, not Bathsheba.

But Bathsheba reminds us of the trouble, the scandal.

And Matthew can’t seem to bring himself to mention her name.

And he’s not the only one: the narrator of the original story has a hard time using her name.

They are uncomfortable with the whole affair.

And we are too: uncomfortable with the topic of sin, the very mention of it, let alone naming our actual wrong-doings.

So we tend to hide our misdeeds.

We hide them from others. Like David trying to cover-up, whitewash, his affair.

We hide from ourselves. Like David hearing Nathan’s story...and not having a clue it was all about him.

Or we blame others. Like Matthew (and others) wanting to pawn off the blame on Bathsheba, the whole incident being a stain on David’s reputation.

We blame. We hide.

But in each instance, we fail to see that we are hiding from the very thing that can restore us...and heal us.

It is what Jesus came for, is it not?

What Matthew eventually admits for himself (and others).

In that story immediately following the genealogy, where an angel appears to Joseph in a dream, and says,

“You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”
(Matthew 1:21 NRSV)

Maybe that’s why Matthew mentioned Bathsheba after all.

He realized she was there by grace...as was he.

As are we all.

A grace even David experiences.

“I have sinned against the Lord!” David exclaims.

To which Nathan responds, *“The Lord has removed your sin.”*

And David is forgiven, just like that.

It appears so quick and easy. Like every Sunday morning when we have a prayer of confession and then an assurance of our forgiveness...and then we go on. “No big deal.”

But don’t be fooled into thinking it’s as simple – or simplistic – as that.

For, no matter how simply or succinctly it is stated, forgiveness is not cheap: it costs a life.

But we know something about that...from the Child of Bethlehem's later-life cross.

"You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." And it will cost him his life in the process.

No, forgiveness is not cheap – it is costly.

But it is also free: unearned, undeserved – costly! – and free.

And that is grace.

We experience the birth of grace and forgiveness in the birth of Christ.

But not only do we experience the birth of grace and forgiveness in the coming of Christ, we can also experience that birth...in us.

Notice that, in the telling of the story in II Samuel, Bathsheba continues to be listed as "the wife of Uriah"...until after the death of the child from her initial union with David. And then we read,

"David comforted his wife Bathsheba."

That is the first time her name has been mentioned since the whole sordid affair began.

And in between those two mentions of her name, David has "taken her," murdered her husband, abused his power and position...and been found out and accused.

"I have sinned," he finally admits to Nathan.

And there is forgiveness – grace.

And yes, the child of the adulterous union dies: a consequence of sin. And a reminder that we are not always saved from the consequences of our ill-doings.

And then here, for the first time, there is mention of David dealing with Bathsheba with anything like tenderness or care.

"David comforted his wife Bathsheba."

Before, he has "taken her" and done this and done that to her.

But now, *"David comforted his wife Bathsheba."*

And I cannot help but think that it is because of the grace and forgiveness David himself has experienced that he can turn to Bathsheba with grace and forgiveness and "comfort" her in her hour of grief and loss.

And together, in that experience of grace and in that *sharing* of grace, they give birth to a new hope and a new future; to a new peace – Solomon, whose name means peace; birth to a new love – Jedidiah, whose name means 'loved by the Lord'.

You see, grace is never solely for me. It is not only *my* experience.

As much as it is to be received – incomparable gift that it is – it is also to be shared.

Shared in forgiving the friend who has wronged us.

Shared in giving to the one who does not deserve it but obviously has a need.

Shared in how we care for one another and relate to each other.

In that, we affirm Bathsheba – and David, for that matter – are included in the family tree of Jesus by grace...as are we.

***HYMN** “What Child Is This” GtG 145

1. **What child is this, who, laid to rest,
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the babe, the son of Mary!**

2. **Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear, shall pierce him through;
the cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail, the Word made flesh,
the babe, the son of Mary!**

3. **So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;
come, one and all, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings;
let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high.
The virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy, for Christ is born,
the babe, the son of Mary!**

(Public Domain)

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in God,
whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image,
male and female, of every race and people,
to live as one community.
But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
Ignoring God's commandments,
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,**

accept lies as truth,
exploit neighbor and nature,
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
We deserve God's condemnation.
Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
In everlasting love,
the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
to bless all families of the earth.
Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.
Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: O God, who is with us,
God of grace,...

People: ...hear our prayer.

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*

O God, what gift can we bring that is worthy of the Christ Child? We bring what we can; we bring who we are. With the offerings we bring, we present ourselves to be used by you to let others know of the coming of your Son and the wonders of your grace and love. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” GtG 119**

- 1. 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 th'angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"**

- 2. Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of the virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the God-head see;
hail th'incarnate deity,
pleased in flesh with us to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"**

- 3. Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the sun of righteousness!
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 us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"**

(Public Domain)

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

The Call to Worship and Prayers of the People (adapted) are used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2012/2013.

The Prayers of the People (adapted) are used by permission from *When We Gather Year C* by James G. Kirk. Copyright 1985 The Geneva Press.

The Prayer of Dedication is from *Lectionary Worship Aids, Series VI, Cycle C* by H. Burnham Kirkland. Used by permission, CSS Publishing Company, Inc., copyright 2003.