

Sunday, December 20th, 2020

Advent 4- Home Service

Welcome

We acknowledge the Passamaquoddy People and their stewardship of this land throughout the ages



Centering Music

Sussex Carol

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYQ5hEYQnFw>

[arranged David Willcocks] sung by Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, recorded live at Yorkminster Park Baptist Church

Gathering Words

Welcome to this Sunday of Love, a Sunday when we remember stories of love old and new- stories which bring hope and peace and joy to birth- stories which echo in beloved and beautiful music. May Love appear before you today, as a blossom bright, as a light shining on the longest night, as a gently burning fire warming the coldest winter.

Advent Carol

O, How A Rose E'er Blooming

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rv0EMbt3kiM>

[traditional German] sung by Christ Church Cathedral Choir, Oxford

***Lo, how a rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming
As seers of old have sung
It came, a blossom bright,
Amid the cold of winter
When half spent was the light.***

***Isaiah 'twas foretold it
The rose I have in mind,
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
She bore for us a saviour,
When half spent was the night.***

Lighting of Advent Candle *do use a wreath or candle if you have one*

It won't be long now. Our Advent waiting is almost over. These last 3 weeks we have lit the candles of hope, peace, and joy. *[if you have a wreath light those candles now if you have not already done so]*
The day of Emmanuel - God with us - is very near, singing to us with songs of love.

What does love look like?

Love looks like a parent working three or four minimum wage jobs to pay the rent and buy the groceries. Love looks like a community coming together to help that parent have a better Christmas, or working towards becoming a society where everyone has enough. Love looks like a health care worker, taking care of patients overtime in this pandemic season. Love looks like a tiny baby, tightly bundled, lying in a feed trough in a barn- God within one of us, one like us, trying to find a home in this world. Love looks like that same baby, grown up now, kneeling at the feet of his friends, washing the muck from their feet teaching them to do likewise. Love bears pain and sadness and yet gives birth to beautiful new beginnings.

What does love feel like?

Love feels like a warm blanket on a cold night. Love feels like a heart overflowing. Love feels like a heart broken. Love feels like a caring network of friends and family helping us survive hard times. Love feels like the solid ground beneath us. Love feels like a mighty river, unstoppable. Love feels like God.

What is it like to live in love?

Love hangs on and hangs in. Love is kind. Love is tenacious. Love speaks up for the vulnerable and is tireless in seeking justice. Love gives itself away, respecting those with whom we have differences. Love is born in a stable. Love endures even beyond death. Today we light the candle named Love.

The candle of Love is lit.

God of love, we remember the love which celebrated Jesus' birth, the love which embraces all people as your precious ones, your chosen ones. May our hearts be full of this love. Light our way, that we may see signs of your love, and be signs of your love to all the world. Amen.

Response

Hope Shines as The Solitary Star.

{Maclean/Tissander} Westminster United Church, Humboldt SK *[You can substitute Love for Hope as you sing this]*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3avqwK4xe7w>

Hope shines as the solitary star, faith is the inward light.

You and I together mirror the light of lights

And illumine the pathway home.

A Small Story

There are many stories about Christmas trees- maybe you've heard or read them. This year has been a big year for Christmas trees - they are flying off the lots faster than ever- I think we are wanting to look at beautiful trees and beautiful Christmas lights this year. But here's a story about a different tree - it may remind you of a Charlie Brown Christmas- but it happened right here in St Andrews- thank you to Pat Craig whose story it is.

One day Pat was out for a walk in St Andrews. She saw a small tree lying on the ground. It looked very sad. It was an evergreen of some kind but it had lost most or all of its leaves. It looked as if it was being left out to be taken away with the trash. She thought: this tree needs to be loved. She took it home and decorated it as if it was the most special tree ever, and gave it pride of place in her window. She showed it to our study group on Zoom- and you know, it looked as if that tree was exactly in the right place. Now it had a good home. And now it wouldn't get thrown out. Since it had already lost its leaves, it would do just as well for next Christmas. As we looked at it - do you know? we could see what a little love can do!

Readings from Ancient and Modern Wisdom

Little Tree

e.e cummings

little tree

little silent Christmas tree

you are so little

you are more like a flower

who found you in the green forest

and were you very sorry to come away?

see I will comfort you

because you smell so sweetly

I will kiss your cool bark

and hug you safe and tight

just as your mother would,

only don't be afraid

look the spangles

that sleep all the year in a dark box

dreaming of being taken out and allowed to shine,

the balls the chains red and gold the fluffy threads,

put up your little arms

and I'll give them all to you to hold

every finger shall have its ring

and there won't be a single place dark or unhappy

then when you're quite dressed

you'll stand in the window for everyone to see

and how they'll stare!

oh but you'll be very proud

and my little sister and I will take hands

and looking up at our beautiful tree

we'll dance and sing

'Noel Noel'

Luke 1:26-46

The angel visits Mary and Mary visits Elizabeth

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you. But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' 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. 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. For nothing will be impossible with God.' 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.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be* a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

Special Music

In The Bleak Midwinter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqewrXuEMrk>

[Rossetti/Holst] sung by Genesis 16

*In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow; snow on snow.
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

*Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign;
in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
the Lord God almighty, Jesus Christ.*

*Enough for him, whom cherubim worship night and day,
a breast full of milk, and a manger full of hay.
Enough for him, whom angels fall down before,
the ox and ass and camel which adore.*

*What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb,
if I were a wise one, I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him—give my heart.*

Reflection

The birth of love

First: Christmas is not cancelled!

You know it's not.

No matter what, we still have the heart of it: Love.

A divine love story

God is Love - as the Gospels remind us.

Jesus showed us God's Love in human form, Love one could see and hear and touch.

A Love full of compassion for the need, the pain, the vulnerability of persons and creatures. -

This divine Love story began before Jesus -

It's found well beyond Christianity-

And it did not stop with Jesus.

Love is not easy- Compassion's not easy.

Such love is not easy.

It's not easy to be in places of need, protecting and tending the vulnerable.

And who is more vulnerable than a human baby, entirely dependent on loving care, far longer than other animals?

Who is more vulnerable than even the bravest woman going through pregnancy and labour?

Especially in the ancient world- a teen mother like Mary, an older woman like Elizabeth- high risk in times and places when birth is especially risky.

But both bravely bore the burden- committing to bear and cherish frail small beings - heading into the anxiety many mothers feel lifelong-

The more so when their children's chosen paths lead into dangerous territory-

And we know -with hindsight- that both these mothers were heading into heartache.

Love isn't easy

But the love stories continue

Even, especially, in trying times like 2020.

Stories like that of Pat, loving a tree that needed some love.

Stories like that of countless families, mastering strange technology to keep connecting and celebrating together virtually.

Such as that of a young friend, celebrating her 30th birthday virtually with friends- and inviting gifts to a wonderful food security and waste reduction network she works with in Guelph.

Stories like that of Aura, interviewed on CBC radio-

She and her family were newly arrived in St Stephen from Mexico.

She speaks warmly of all the kindness offered through the Charlotte County Community Help Group: network- help figuring out what the helps and supports are, people offering to drop off their groceries while they were in isolation, many a generous word of welcome.

Loving the stranger, the one who isn't yet a friend- that's what Jesus came to earth to teach , as do many other faith traditions.

And then there are the stories of volunteers doing check-in calls with St Andrews seniors

And giving of their time to deliver groceries and other necessities.

And stories of our COVID safe Wesley space helping Christmas Love continue:

The Kiwanis preparing Christmas baskets for local seniors- which many of us were thrilled to receive-

And Open Door setting up with toys and sweets and gift cards for those needing some help and encouragement in this season.

Harbour Lights and Secret Santas happened virtually this year- and yet there has been an outpouring of generous giving.

In Digby Nova Scotia a church opened its doors to the hardworking volunteers trying to find those scallop fishers- and I'm sure the community will find ways, even amid COVID, to care for the grieving families.

Around here even amid COVID volunteer firefighters go into situations where they will know the people affected-

And Search and Rescue teams tried very hard to find that missing woman in town here.

Something in us wants to reach out to people who are vulnerable, marginalized, living with financial stress and food insecurity, lonely, grieving- whether we know them or not, and whether or not we can do all we would like to.

And something in us wants to make a more loving, more compassionate world for all - continuing to make the prophets' dreams, Jesus' dream, Mary's dream come true.

And a final Love Story

And last but not least, there is our 2020 love story of health care workers - going into hospitals, COVID wards, care homes, individual homes to do home care. They take risks daily, as do others who have to work with the public.

But the health care workers in particular witness the loneliness and the anxieties of long term care residents, COVID patients who are very sick and may not make it, even regular patients who can get few or no visits depending what zone they're in.

As you see and hear them or follow them online - people like my physician friend Kimberly in Calgary - you can see the emotion, the compassion, in so many of them- as they go about a labour of love, heartbreaking at times.

And this week a hidden love story touched them - that of researchers and volunteers testing the COVID vaccines-

I shed happy tears watching the first nurses and personal care workers and doctors getting vaccinated –

One spoke of this as an early Christmas present-

One spoke, with tears, of trying to communicate with her care home residents through a mask - looking forward to the future time when that will no longer be necessary- and of her mother living in a care home in another province and watching her get the first vaccination in PEI-

And in some places, this love story revealed itself first to very elderly or vulnerable individuals- a message that they too deserved all the protection and love they could get.

Taking these love stories to heart

As we celebrate the birth of one born of love, born to love,
Born to teach us to love.

Let us express our love as we stay in touch safely and work for a safe, compassionate community. In the words of a rabbi in a Montreal care home- impeded in speech but not in thought:
“To vaccinate is an act of love, an act of kindness.

This is a moment to stop competing and living as strangers with each others and to open up our compassionate avenue of sharing, all of us are going to heal the world and that is what we are created for .”

May we too walk this compassionate path as we share in the birth of love.
Amen.

Reflective Music

O Holy Night

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITlaYoWCPkE>

[Cappeau/Adam, sung by Celtic trio and choir- 3rd verse not sung I think, but it's lovely to read nonetheless]

***O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.***

***Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appear'd and the soul felt its worth.***

***A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.***

***Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born;
O night divine, O night, O night Divine.***

*Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here come the wise men from the Orient land.
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger;
In all our trials born to be our friend.*

*He knows our need, to our weaknesses no stranger,
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King, Before Him lowly bend!*

*Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;
And in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name.*

*Christ is the Lord! O praise His Name forever,
His power and glory evermore proclaim.
His power and glory evermore proclaim*

Offering Prayer

We give thanks for the gift of Love- Love shown forth in Jesus and in all who reflect God's Love. We offer these gifts and we offer ourselves in a spirit of Love. May we choose the ways of love in this season and every season. May our loving choices be a blessing to this beloved community, and this beloved world. Amen

Prayers of the People

Holy One, in this season we have sought the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love-
Gifts much needed in these days,
Gifts with us even now,

As we embrace the gift of this present moment,
Offered us in music and story and community.

May this season pen us to the wonder, beauty and wisdom still present in our world and our hearts-
Gifts given long ago, gifts given again and again, gifts we too help to spread in our living and being.

We give thanks today for all whose labours of love bring gifts to our world-
Those helping neighbours with a little Christmas cheer,
Those seeking to make a happy Christmas for children, no matter what,
Those learning new technology so that they can be with their loved ones virtually,
Those front-line workers caring for the sick at home or hospital,
Those health officers overseeing our safety and wellbeing,
Those working hard to get vaccinations out to those who need them most,

And all those we may not hear of who are helping to care for those who are hungry or homeless or refugees.

God ever wise, your Spirit alerts us to the needs and troubles of this world- places where joy is hard to find because of war or abuse or prejudice or injustice,

Places where love may seem absent, where loneliness and other troubles overwhelm.

God, Compassionate One, we remember before you those who struggle to find joy in these times,

Those struggling to make ends meet,
those who are ill, those grieving,
Those who will miss seeing loved ones in this season,
Those in our care facilities,
Those who find this a time of painful memories.

Among these may be some people we know- and so in a moment of silence we hold in love and light those who need our prayers:

May your Light shine in their hearts and your Love wrap them around and may each of us be bearers of Light and Love in the ways we can.

We pray also for ourselves in all that makes this season and time difficult for us.

May your new birth of Love take place also in our hearts.

These and all our prayers we offer to you in the name of Jesus and we join with all who seek to follow the way of new and vibrant life he followed, as we pray together: Our Father...

Ministry and Mission, Joys and Concerns

Music

When A Child Is Born

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kgE3J7bFQY>

[Jay/Dammico and Bemba, *sung by Andrea Bocelli*] *the song finishes after about 3 '26"*

A ray of hope flickers in the sky
A tiny star lights up way up high
All across the land, dawns a brand new morn
This comes to pass when a child is born

A silent wish sails the seven seas
The winds of change whisper in the trees
And the walls of doubt crumble, tossed and torn
This comes to pass when a child is born

A rosy hue settles all around
You've got the feel you're on solid ground
For a spell or two, no-one seems forlorn
This comes to pass when a child is born

And all of this happens because the world is waiting,
Waiting for one child
Black, white, yellow, no-one knows
But a child that will grow up and turn tears to laughter,
Hate to love, war to peace and everyone to everyone's neighbour
And misery and suffering will be words to be forgotten, forever

It's all a dream, an illusion now
It must come true, sometime soon somehow
All across the land, dawns a brand-new morn
This comes to pass when a child is born

Words of Parting and Blessing

Thanks be to God, for the Word-Made-Flesh. Go now, celebrating the Light of the World in this season of Advent. Expand the Light. Announce the Hope. Spread the peace. Join the joy. Offer the love. May the word of God keep speaking through you and me, in these days and always. Amen.

A Send-Off into Christmas "Il est né, le divin Enfant"

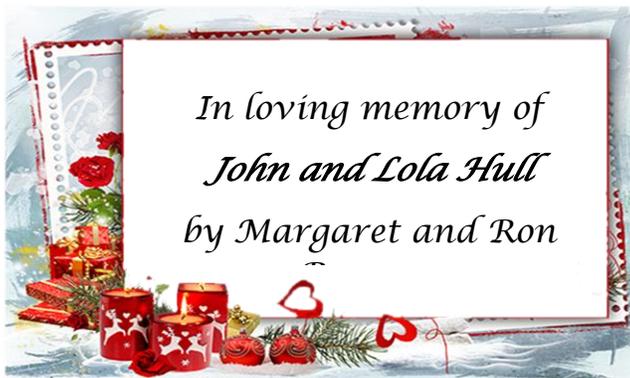
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwGm2vtYB_Q

traditional French- translation below by Edward Reed- sung in French by VOICES- Landesjugendchor. [youth choir]

Chorus: He is born, the Heav'nly Child,
Oboes play; set bagpipes sounding.
He is born, the Heav'nly Child,
Let all sing His nativity.

'Tis four thousand years and more,
Prophets have foretold His coming.
'Tis four thousand years and more,
Have we waited this happy hour. **Chorus**

Ah, how lovely, Ah, how fair,
What perfection is His graces.
Ah, how lovely, Ah, how fair,
Child divine, so gentle there. **Chorus**



Advent candle-lighting adapted from John Moses and Blessing adapted from Elaine Bidgood-Sveet , both in in Gathering A/C/E 2020-2021. Other prayers by Jane