

DECEMBER 19, 2021 10:00 AM
4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



**St. John United Church of
Christ**

**10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview
Heights, IL
397-6323**

Rev. Rosemary Captain

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Before the majesty of God, we gather to worship; in quiet expectation, we come to hear God's promises.

This is where we belong; here we are warmly greeted. Surely God will feed our deepest hunger.

Before God's strength and power, we bow down; in hesitant anticipation, we listen for God's judgment.

This is our home, where our lives are redirected. Surely God will show us new ways to live.

Before the mercy of God, we lift our hearts; in humble imagination, we welcome a new visitation.

This day God is present with us; we feel it. Surely God is preparing for us a time of joy.

***UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

Let your face shine on us, mighty God. Break through the obstacles that keep us from seeing your way. Melt down the barriers that keep us from knowing the embrace of your love. Remove from us the low self-esteem that keeps us from valuing the overwhelming gift of life that you entrust to us. Speak to us here in life-changing accents. Amen.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 1:39-55**

³⁹ Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. ⁴⁰ She entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² With a loud voice she blurted out,

"God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. ⁴³ Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. ⁴⁵ Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her." ⁴⁶ Mary said, "With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

⁴⁷ In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. ⁴⁸ He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored ⁴⁹ because the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name. ⁵⁰ He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who honors him as God. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

⁵² He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed. ⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, ⁵⁵ just as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants forever."

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "When God Calls What Will Be Your Answer?"

On the last Sunday before Christmas our expectations are heightened especially by

the scene in our Gospel lection as the two pregnant women marvel at the meaning of the birth of Mary's child.

The stage is being set for the fulfillment of the ancient promises as Elizabeth blesses Mary for believing that the promise would come true and Mary affirms that God is remembering what he said "to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

An example of these promises is in the book of Micah. God will indeed judge the people and punish them with military defeat and exile; but later, as an act of grace, the Lord will bring the people back and establish a reign of perpetual peace, with its center in Jerusalem and its leader a king in the line of David. (Micah 4:1-5).

The two women we read about today, are both with child. One thought she was too old, and the other thought she was too young and inexperienced. Both were called by God. Both requests from God involved God's plan and will for the world. Both were grateful that God had blessed them.

To be chosen by God so often means at one and the same time a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. The piercing truth is that God does not choose a person for ease and comfort and selfish joy but for a task that will take all the head and heart and hand can bring it. We must remember that God chooses us in order to use us.

At this time these two women don't realize what will happen to their sons. John will be beheaded and Jesus will die on a

cross like a criminal. Knowing that, do you think these women would decline the blessing God is giving them?

God never promises that life will be without sorrows, but God does promise that those who follow his will will receive glory for their willingness to answer God's call.

How will you respond when God calls you? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer. God of patience and mercy. You give us gifts and blessings galore. This time of year is the time of giving and offering presents, but what can we give you, God of wonders?

We can give you our time. We can give you our praise and our thanks. And we can

give you ourselves to be used for your will. The tasks you ask of us are not easy, but they are possible. All things are possible for you.

Today we bring you those who need blessings and maybe the impossible. If a cure is not possible than bring them wholeness and peace.

We pray for those on our prayer list and we pray for all those affected by the storms and tornados las week. May they find strength in you to continue their lives when all is gone. We pray for all the fire fighters, EMT's, Red Cross workers, UCC Disaster ministers, and all those who are helping the people who lost everything including loved ones.

We know, dear God, that you did not cause the act of nature. Our earth is not perfect and storms, tornados, flooding, earth quakes, blizzards, and all other acts of nature just happen. We DO know that your spirit was with each of those people in harm's way.

We pray all these things in the name of the One born in a stable . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your 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.

PRAYER RESPONSE:

“Away in a Manger” verse 3

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in your tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with you there.

INVITATION TO GIVE:

In this season, we remember the greatest offering of all time. God’s gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. The only appropriate response is our giving of ourselves. What we place in the plate today symbolizes the depth of our commitment. As we show how thankful we are.

***DOXOLOGY: NCH 780**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

**Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done.
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

Thank you, God, for your mercy and protection, for feeding us physically and spiritually, for caring for us like a shepherd. We present our offerings as an act of gratitude. We dedicate ourselves and these gifts to honor Christ through ministry in the church, in the community and in the world. Amen.

***RESPONSIVE COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

Depart from this place to do God’s will.
Carry your discipleship and service into the world.

**Our spirits rejoice in God's saving grace.
Our lives have been equipped to meet the world.**

Greet Strangers as you have been greeted here. Feed them as you have been fed by a living God.

**Our estrangement has been overcome.
We want to welcome neighbors into God's family.**

God's mercy continues from generation to generation. You are accepted and loved and sent forth.

In gratitude and joy we accept our commission. Our spirits rejoice to share good news. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Joe Knapp, Agnes Doctolero, David Seneczyn, Cathy Ganschinietz,

Warren Neff, Jack Harris, Lynn Hursey, Robert Uhrig, Carol White, Dan Ragen.

There will not be a bulletin on Christmas Eve or December 26. Please come to church for the Christmas Eve Service at 7 pm. If you need a ride, contact Judy Hartmann.

If you would like to support those affected by the storms and tornados last week, you are invited to write a check to the church and put UCC Disaster Ministries in the memo line.