

**December 5, 2021 – 10 am  
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**



**MORE CHAIRS AT THE TABLE**

**St. John United Church of Christ  
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL  
397-6323  
Rev. Rosemary Captain**

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Listen! Listen for a messenger from God.

The way is being prepared for Christ's coming.

**We are here to listen for a word from God.**

**We have gathered to prepare for Christ's advent.**

Come with your joys and sorrows, laughter and tears.

There is a place for you in the company of seekers.

**We thank you God for our acceptance in the church.**

**We rejoice to offer the love of Christ to others.**

We are partners in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Claim anew today this opportunity and responsibility.

**We are glad God is doing great things among us.**

**We want to rejoin ourselves to God's work in the world.**

**\*INVITATION TO CONFESSION:**

We come before the refiner's fire, that all falseness and impurities may be burned away. Beneath all the pretense and brokenness of our lives, God helps us to discover pure silver and gold. We are highly valued by our Maker. Let us be fully open to God's forgiving spirit.

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

O God, we have tried to cover up our sins, yet you know the disorder we have caused in our lives. You have witnessed our poor choices and our destructive

habits. We have denied our baptism and ignored the responsibilities of discipleship. The good we do is often self-serving, while we avoid the full claims of gospel partnership. Hear our cries of repentance and turn our lives around, that we may know the wonder of your forgiveness. Amen.

*(silence for personal confession)*

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON:**

Good news! God has done great things for us. We are loved; we are forgiven; we are claimed by God's grace. The Holy One has begun a good work in us. Even now, the love of God is expanding our knowledge, sharpening our discernment, and equipping us for excellence. Go and bear fruit.

**\*GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 1:68-79**

This scripture text needs a little back ground information. It's a beautiful prophetic message in the form of a prayer blessing God for what God has done. but we should know the circumstances for it to be truly meaningful. I invite you to read Luke 1:5-25, 57-67 to get the whole story. Right now, I'll summarize it.

Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth, were childless and getting up in years. God hear their prayers and granted a pregnancy for Elizabeth. When the child

was born, the neighbors asked what the child's name would be. The names given to children are very important in the Jewish tradition. The name says what the child will be in life. Usually, the child is named after the father or some other relative. God told Zacharias to name his son, John. The neighbors are shocked. Verses 65-67 continue the story. "Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become? For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him. Then his father Zachariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:"

And now we are ready for our lectionary text. This is the answer to the neighbors' questions.

<sup>68</sup> "Bless the Lord God of Israel because he has come to help and has delivered his people.

<sup>69</sup> He has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David's house,

<sup>70</sup> just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago.

<sup>71</sup> He has brought salvation from our enemies and from the power of all those who hate us.

<sup>72</sup> He has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and remembered his holy covenant,

<sup>73</sup> the solemn pledge he made to our ancestor Abraham. He has granted <sup>74</sup> that we would be rescued from the power of our enemies so that we could serve him without fear,  
<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness in God's eyes, for as long as we live.

<sup>76</sup> You, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way.

<sup>77</sup> You will tell his people how to be saved through the forgiveness of their sins.

<sup>78</sup> Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us,

<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace."

These are the words of the ancient story,  
to be heard anew.

**Thanks be to God. Amen**

**MESSAGE: "Advent Prophecy and Promises"**

Each of our four Gospels tells the story of the birth of Jesus in a different way. The Gospel of Matthew starts with the genealogy of Jesus to show how he is related to King David. The Gospel of Mark begins with an adult John baptizing at the Jordan. There is

no actual birth story. In the Gospel of John there is also no birth story. It opens with John baptizing people and being harassed by the Jewish authorities. And the Gospel of Luke begins by telling the story of John's conception and his birth and naming service. The Gospel of Matthew has the Wise Men come to visit baby Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, the shepherds come. So, just as an aside, when we have the Christmas Pageant we create a 5<sup>th</sup> Gospel where the Wise Men AND the shepherds are present. We put it all together.

You may wonder why we are examining the birth and life of John. Of course, we know that John was very influential in the faith formation of Jesus.

When John is born Zacharias had a great vision for his son. He thought of him as the prophet and the forerunner who would prepare the way of the Lord. All devout Jews hoped and longed for the day when the Messiah, God's anointed king, would come. Most of them believed that before he came, a forerunner would announce his coming and prepare the way.

One way to look at this relationship between John and Jesus is to think of it as steps for us in the Christian way. Going back to Luke 1:75-77 we can see a picture of how that might happen. (The words of William Barclay).

- 1.) There is *preparation*. All life is a preparation to lead us to Christ. All our lives we can see how God is working all things together to bring us to Christ.
- 2.) There is *knowledge*. It is the simple fact that there was no real understanding of what God was like until Jesus came. The Greeks thought of a passionless God, beyond all joy and sorrow, looking on humanity in calm unmoved detachment. Jews thought of a demanding God, whose name was law and whose function was that of a judge - nothing but fear there. Jesus came to tell that God was love, and in staggered amazement people said, "We never knew that God was like that." One of the great functions of the incarnation was to bring people the knowledge of God.
- 3.) There is *forgiveness*. It is not so much the remission of penalty as the restoration of a relationship. Nothing can deliver us from certain consequences of our sins; the clock cannot be put back; but estrangement from God is turned to friendship, the distant God has become near and the God we feared has become the lover of human souls.
- 4.) There is *walking* in the ways of peace. *Peace* in Hebrew does not mean merely freedom from

trouble; it means all that makes for our highest good; and through Christ we are enabled to walk in the ways that lead to everything that means life, and no longer to all that means death.

See if these steps make sense to you.

I'm sorry this message is so long, but sometimes I need to hike up the mountain to get to the peak of the message.

Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** Beginning with silent personal prayer. God of so many blessings, how can we ever thank you enough? Your answer would probably be for each of us to follow the way of Jesus as best we can. That's how we can give you thanks and praise; each time we give a little more money in the plate, each time we help more people, each time we show love to others. Have mercy on us as we keep trying.

Today we remember the victims of the school shooting at Oxford High School in Michigan. We pray for all those who are in harm's way and live in constant fear. We pray for those who have food insecurities. We

pray for those who are hurting, sick, lonely, and all those on our prayer list.

We pray for the newest victims of Covid and we are thankful for the scientist's who are trying to find the best way to keep us all safe. We pray all these things in the name of God's son, Jesus. Amen.

**\*CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION:**

**\*INVITATION TO COMMUNION:** — from Todd Jenkins' longer poem "Advent(ure)" (*used by permission*)

The sacred unfolding of these four gifts —  
hope, peace, love, and joy —  
in their unvarnished glory, will flip our political  
and socioeconomic culture on its head,  
ushering in a new vision of community that's more in  
line with justice than we've ever dreamed,  
as it invites everyone to the table,  
which causes us to scramble for more chairs.

Come to think of it, maybe searching for ways  
to extend the table is precisely what Advent is  
supposed to be about. (Be seated)

**WORDS OF REMEMBERING:**

We remember that Jesus was always about

more chairs — for the "friendly beasts" a cow whose  
manger fed him, the birds that never fall unloved,  
and the comforting animals of his forty wilderness  
days.

Jesus was always about more chairs, for the poor,  
lonely, grieving, hungry, the most vulnerable and  
rejected, and even those deep in deserved regret.

And we remember that Jesus sat in the chairs of  
anyone who welcomed him. He came to tables and  
asked for food, not to see the guest list. He knew  
how multiply barley loaves but, also, how to grill fish.

In this sacrament on Advent's day of Peace,  
we remember that the starlit Child, protected by  
angels grew up to offer bread and cup to a betrayer,  
a denier, a doubter, several sleepers, many who fled  
because at the cross there were no angels.

We remember that Jesus is in the Bread and Cup  
for those of us who know its blessing well, and yet is  
still pulling out folding chairs so that more, ... even all  
can come, sit, rest, eat.

**PRAYER OF CONSECRATION:**

Emmanuel, God with us, in the hopes and fears of all  
our years, we come for comfort, for peace of mind  
and peace on earth, for a blessing on our hands and  
the Bread in them, on our lips and the Cup we lift to  
drink.

*(in silence or with music playing – breaking, touching or lifting the Bread, pouring, touching or lifting the Cup)*

May this Bread and Cup be all your holy life, that we may ponder in our hearts, and pray in our community ...

**THE PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR:**

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.

**SHARING OF THE ELEMENTS:**

Leader: The Holy Child of Bethlehem descends to us,

**Unison: and is born in us in these days.**

Leader: Let us share the bread.

**Unison: We hear Christmas angels  
their great glad tidings tell.**

Leader: Let us drink deeply for in every time  
Christ abides with us.

**Unison: In every time and every place  
Christ abides *in* us.**

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

Peace-giver, Blessor of tables shared and some tables turned over, we rise or roll from our places at this most welcoming meal prepared anew to live Advent hospitality, by becoming your chair-people, not leaders, but ushers and servers for the worldwide banquet of grace. Amen.

(So very much gratitude to Todd Jenkins for his poem to shape this month's Liturgy.)

**\*RESPONSIVE BENEDICTION:**

Remember those messengers of the faith you have known; rejoice and give thanks for their witness.

**We, too, will prepare the way of Christ; we will help to level the hills and valleys.**

Hold one another in your hearts day by day; pray that love may rule all your relationships.

**We will weep with those who weep.**

**We will rejoice with those who rejoice.**

God will be with you wherever you go; the good work begun in you will be brought to completion.

**All flesh will see the salvation of our God;  
we will live in covenant with our Creator.**

**Amen.**