

Sunday, December 23, 2018
Fourth Sunday of Advent

PRELUDE

"O Come, All Ye Faithful"
Stephen Schmidt

arr. Willcocks

***GATHERING SONG**

"Angels, from the Realms of Glory"

ELW 275

Brass: Mike Ceperley, Sylvester Heeler, Phil Heeler, Phil Lewis

Angels, from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
once you sang creation's story,
now proclaim Messiah's birth:
Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Shepherds, in the fields abiding,
watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing,
yonder shines the infant light.
Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Sages, leave your contemplations,
brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great desire of nations,
you have seen his natal star.
Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

All creation, join in praising
God, the Father, Spirit, Son,
evermore your voices raising
to the eternal Three in One.
Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

***LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH**

P *We praise you, O God, for this wheel of time*

C **that marks our days of preparation for Christ's advent.**

As we light the candles on this wreath,
open our eyes to see your presence
in the lowly ones of this earth.

Enlighten us with your grace,
that we may sing of your advent among us
in the Word made flesh.

Grant this through Christ our Lord,
whose coming is certain and whose day draws near.
Amen!

Kindle this flame of love.
May it burn bright and true.
Lighting the way that is of God,
the journey we pursue.

God's realm is our desire,
where peace and justice reign.
Heaven and earth combined as one,
when Christ shall come again.

***GREETING**

P *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

G And also with you.

***CANTICLE OF PRAISE**

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" vs. 6

ELW 257

O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer;
O Sun of justice, now draw near.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadow put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

P *Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come.*

G With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that binds us, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

ANTHEM

"Long Ago in Bethlehem"

Robert W. Thygerson

Chancel Choir

FIRST READING

Micah 5:2-5a

The prophet Micah, having pronounced judgment upon Judah, speaks of a future shepherd-king who, like David, will come from the small town of Bethlehem. (Ephrathah refers to the area around Bethlehem.) This king will restore Israel and bring peace. New Testament writers understood this passage to be referring to Jesus.

²But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,

from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.

³Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.

⁴And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;

^{5a}and he shall be the one of peace.

Reflection

What is the significance of Bethlehem? (1 Samuel 16:1-13, Matthew 2:5-6) According to the notes in the Lutheran Bible, "Ephrathah" means "fertile." What is going on in the time of Micah's prophecy? (see Micah 5:1—the siege is laid against Jerusalem) How long will the siege last? (verse 3) Note that this verse is not talking about Mary giving birth, but another woman who is pregnant at the time. What will the Lord do for the people? (verse 4) For people experiencing war and a siege against their city, what does the promise in verse 5 mean to them? What does this promise mean to us?

PSALM

Luke 1:46b-55

^{46b}My soul proclaims the greatness | of the Lord,

⁴⁷my spirit rejoices in | God my Savior,

⁴⁸**for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your | lowly servant.**

From this day all generations will | call me blessed:

⁴⁹you, the Almighty, have done great | things for me
and holy | is your name.

⁵⁰**You have mercy on | those who fear you,
from generation to | generation.**

⁵¹You have shown strength | with your arm
and scattered the proud in | their conceit,

⁵²**casting down the mighty | from their thrones
and lifting | up the lowly.**

⁵³You have filled the hungry | with good things
and sent the rich | away empty.

⁵⁴**You have come to the aid of your | servant Israel,
to remember the prom- | ise of mercy,**

⁵⁵the promise made | to our forbears,
to Abraham and his chil- | dren forever.

Reflection

This is one of the alternatives for the psalm of the day, and it is included in the Gospel text for today. This is known as Mary's Song, or "the Magnificat," from the first words of this text in Latin. Why is Mary singing praise to the Lord? "My soul magnifies the Lord" to me means that

this song is like a microscope or a telescope through which we can see the deeds of the Lord. What deeds does Mary make known in her song? Who is lifted up by the Lord? (verses 48-50, 52-55) Who does the Lord “scatter” and “bring down”? (verses 51-52) This reminds me of the text from Isaiah quoted in last week’s Gospel text—“every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.” For those who are used to being “up” it can feel like a great descent to be brought down equal with those who have been low. How is this song good news for both those who are being lifted up and those who are being brought low?

SECOND READING

Hebrews 10:5-10

The author of Hebrews uses the image of religious sacrifice to convey the significance of Christ’s coming. Through obedient acceptance of God’s will, Christ allows his own body to become the greatest sacrifice of all, one through which we are made a holy people.

⁵Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;

⁶in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.

⁷Then I said, ‘See, God, I have come to do your will, O God’
(in the scroll of the book it is written of me).”

⁸When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹then he added, “See, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Reflection

This text talks about the sacrifice of Christ. When and where does this sacrifice take place? (verse 5) What does the sacrifice of Christ replace? (verses 6-9) Whose will is it that Christ sacrifice his body? (verse 10) What is the result of this sacrifice? Note that this is different from the sacrifices offered according to the law. (See Hebrews 10:1-4, 11) What difference does it make to us that Christ has offered himself as the sacrifice? What then do we need to sacrifice for our sins? (verse 10) For those of us who persist in trying to make ourselves worthy of God, what does this mean? (If you need help with this, review the meaning of the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed in Luther’s Small Catechism, which you can find in the red hymnal on p. 1162.)

***GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

“Emmanuel”

**Emmanuel, Emmanuel,
his name is called Emmanuel;
God with us, revealed in us;
his name is called Emmanuel.**

***GOSPEL**

Luke 1:39-55

We are presented with Elizabeth, John's mother, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, two women filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. In Elizabeth's inspired greeting and Mary's song of praise we hear of a saving God who remembers, scatters, lifts up, and fulfills all things.

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁴⁶And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things,

and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Reflection

I remember reading this Gospel on the Fourth Sunday of Advent in 1978, when I was visibly pregnant with Elizabeth. I don't know what that meant for others, but for me it helped me understand the promise of new life, especially the new life in Jesus, in a new way! Who did Mary want to share her news with? (verses 39-40) Perhaps you remember a time when unmarried women who were pregnant were regarded as having brought shame to themselves and their families. (The same was not true of the father of the baby.) Elizabeth, a married woman, although sort of old to be having a baby, might have looked down her nose at her cousin Mary, but she didn't. What was her response to Mary's visit? (verses 41-45) Why do you think God chose an unmarried woman to bear Jesus? The church honored Mary, calling her "God-bearer," and the Mother of our Lord. Is Mary different from other young women who become pregnant? Why or why not? What does her song remind us about God's love for those who are often condemned by others?

Love has come—a light in the darkness!
Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.
See, all heaven has come to proclaim it;
hear how their song of joy arises:
Love! Love! Born unto you, a Savior!
Love! Love! Glory to God on high.

Love is born! Come, share in the wonder.
Love is God now asleep in the hay.
See the glow in the eyes of his mother;
what is the name her heart is saying?
Love! Love! Love is the name she whispers;
Love! Love! Jesus, Immanuel.

Love has come and never will leave us!
Love is life everlasting and free.
Love is Jesus within and among us.
Love is the peace our hearts are seeking.
Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas;
Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!

***APOSTLES' CREED**

☑ I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen!

***PRAYER SONG** *“The Spirit Intercedes For Us”*

**The Spirit intercedes for us
with sighs too deep
for words to express, Oh, oh.**

***PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

As we await the coming of Christ, we pray in hope for the church, the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

Faithful Lord, you keep your promises. Move your church to sing like Mary and rejoice like Elizabeth. Teach us to sing of your faithfulness all our days. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Ancient of Days, with joy you danced over the waters and birthed creation. Give us joy in caring for the soil beneath us, the water around us, and the sky above us. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Prince of peace, your sacrifice gives abundant life to all. Raise up leaders in every nation whose goals are health and well-being for all people and creation. Grant them wisdom and compassion to serve as you would have them serve. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Good Shepherd, you feed your flock. Fill the hungry with good things. Lift up the lowly. Accompany the refugee. Comfort the lonely. Heal the sick *especially Trina, Linda, Verna, Elaine, Jim, Dorothy, Lisa and her baby Lara*, and for those we name before you aloud or silently in our hearts (pause for 10 seconds). Send us in haste to surround them with your love. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Love Incarnate, you are with us at the manger, on the cross, and on the resurrection road. Walk with all who live with depression, grief, or heartache in this season. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Ever-living God, you are Alpha and Omega. We thank you for all who sing now in the heavenly choir, especially those dear to us. Join our voices with theirs in praise of the Christ child. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Confident that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, we bring to you these prayers and those unspoken, in the name of Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen!

***SHARING OF THE PEACE**

P *The peace of Christ be with you always.*

☒ And also with you!

BRING FORWARD THE PLEDGES

OFFERTORY

"It Came upon the Midnight Clear"

ELW 282

It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to all,
from heav'n's all-gracious king."
The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heav'nly music floats
o'er all the weary world.
Above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hov'ring wing,
and ever o'er its babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

And you, beneath life's crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow:
look now, for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing;
oh, rest beside the weary road
and hear the angels sing!

For lo! The days are hast'ning on,
by prophets seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold,
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendors fling,
and all the world give back the song
which now the angels sing.

***OFFERING PRAYER**

☒ *God of abundance,*

☒ we bring before you the precious fruits of your creation, and with them our very lives.

Teach us patience and hope as we care for all those in need until the coming of your Son, our Savior and Lord. Amen!

***DIALOGUE**

P *The Lord be with you.*

C **And also with you.**

P *Lift up your hearts.*

C **We lift them to the Lord.**

P *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

C **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

***PREFACE**

P *It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ.
You comforted your people with the promise of the Redeemer,
through whom you will also make all things new
in the day when he comes to judge the world in righteousness.
And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:*

***HOLY, HOLY, HOLY**

**Holy, Holy,
Holy Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full,
Are full of your glory.
Hosanna! Hosanna!
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes,
Who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna! Hosanna!
Hosanna in the highest.**

***THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

P *Holy One, the beginning and the end, the giver of life:
Blessed are you for the birth of creation.
Blessed are you in the darkness and in the light.
Blessed are you for your promise to your people.
Blessed are you in the prophets' hopes and dreams.
Blessed are you for Mary's openness to your will.*

*Blessed are you for your Son Jesus,
the Word made flesh.*

*In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

*Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.
Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:*

C Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

P *With this bread and cup
we remember your Word dwelling among us,
full of grace and truth.
We remember our new birth in his death and resurrection.
We look with hope for his coming.*

C Come, Lord Jesus.

P *Holy God, we long for your Spirit.
Come among us.
Bless this meal.
May your Word take flesh in us.
Awaken your people.
Fill us with your light.
Bring the gift of peace on earth.*

C Come, Holy Spirit.

P *All praise and glory are yours,
Holy One of Israel,
Word of God incarnate,
Power of the Most High,
one God, now and forever.*

C Amen!

***LORD'S PRAYER**

P *Gathered in hope as one, let us pray as Jesus taught us.*

C **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,**

your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen!

***INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

P *God fills the hungry with good things. Taste and see that the Lord is good.*

***BLESSING**

P *The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.*

C Amen!

***PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

P *Holy One,*

C we give you thanks that in this bread and cup we have feasted again on your endless love. Let that love overflow more and more in our lives, that we may be messengers to prepare your way, harvesters of justice and righteousness, and bearers of your eternal Word, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

***BENEDICTION**

P *May God direct your ways in peace,
make you abound in love for one another and for all,
and strengthen your hearts
until the coming of our Lord Jesus.*

*Almighty God, Father, I Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you now and forever.*

C Amen!

***SENDING SONG**

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

ELW 289

Angels we have heard on high,
sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and the mountains in reply,
echoing their joyous strains.

Refrain

**Gloria in excelsis Deo;
gloria in excelsis Deo.**

**Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
which inspire your heav'nly song? *Refrain***

**Come to Bethlehem and see
him whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord, the newborn king. *Refrain***

***DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

****Thanks be to God!****