

**Sunday, December 11, 2016**

*The liturgist and pastor will meet in the hall outside the choir room a couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am. The liturgist will enter and take his seats. The pastor will follow, step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, and make announcements....*

*The preacher will then ask...*

“Are there any other announcements or concerns of the church that need to be made known at this time?..... Thank you.”

*The preacher will take a seat.*

**PRELUDE** "O Come, All Ye Faithful" - **Mary McDonald** **Dr. Elizabeth Davis**  
**CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP** "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" **The Choir**

*After the Choral Call, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,*

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Luke 1 and printed in our bulletins?”

**THE CALL TO WORSHIP** (adapted from Luke 1)

My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his servant.

**For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;**

He who is mighty has done great things for me, & holy is his name.

**His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.**

He has shown strength with his arm and scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,

**He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree;**

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

**He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,**

As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.

**Let us magnify His name forever and ever to all generations!**

Let us worship God beginning today with the lighting of our third Advent Candle by the Booth family...

**LIGHTING THE THIRD ADVENT CANDLE**

*The Booths should be seated at the front, near the Advent wreath. There will be a lighter on the wreath. There should already be two purple candles lit. Adjust the microphone before the service to make sure it is on and set at the right height to pick up your voices. As soon as you are introduced by the liturgist, step to the microphone at the wreath, pick up the lighter, and begin reading.*

**Ava:** Why do we light this candle today?

**Amy:** The third candle of Advent is the Candle of Joy. It reminds us of the joy that Mary felt when the angel Gabriel told her that a special child would be born to her – a child who would save and deliver His people.

**Robbie:** God wants us all to have joy. The angel who announced to the shepherds that Jesus had been born told them: “Do not be afraid. I am bringing you good news of a great joy for all people – for to you is born this day, in the City of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

**Amy:** We light this candle to remember that Christ brings the promise of a new life – a life in which the blind receive sight, the lame walk, and the prisoners are set free. We light it to remember that He is the bringer of true and everlasting joy.

*(Addison lights the 3rd (pink) candle and says...)*

**Addison:** Let us pray...

**Robbie:** Loving God, we thank you for the joy you bring us. Help us prepare our hearts for this gift. Bless our worship. Help us to hear and to do your word. We ask it in the name of the one born in Bethlehem. Amen.

*The Booths will return to their seats in the congregation.*

*As soon as the candle lighters are finished, the liturgist should step back to the microphone and introduce the hymn..*

Would all of you who are able please stand and join in singing our opening hymn, “Gentle Mary

Laid Her Child", #27 in our *Hymnals*.

*The liturgist should step back from the lectern for the singing of the hymn.*

\*HYMN OF PRAISE

"Gentle Mary Laid Her Child"

*The Hymnal #27*

*After the hymn, the preacher will step into the pulpit and say...*

\*CALL TO CONFESSION

Advent is a time to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. Let us take this opportunity to throw back the curtains that God's light may shine into the dark places in our hearts; throw open the windows to air out all that has grown stale within us; take up God's word to sweep away the dust from the corners of our souls. Let us ready ourselves for Christ's coming as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing for a moment of silent prayer at its conclusion. Let us pray...

\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Most gracious and loving God, long ago you spoke to your people through prophets, but they failed to comprehend or receive your good news. When you sent an angel to Mary and told her that she would be the mother of your son, she did not let her lack of understanding get in the way of her obedience. Deliver us from allowing our ignorance to lead us into an endless round of trivial pursuits this Christmas. Help us to understand that the message of Christ's coming is good news for us and for the whole world. May our joy empower our sharing so that we may sustain the gift of your love throughout this season and throughout the rest of our lives. May we wear our faith as Mary did when she said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Amen.

\*SILENT CONFESSION *(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)*

\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Jesus came to us, not to condemn us, but to save us from our sins. Friends believe the Good News!

**In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!**

\*GLORIA PATRI

*The Hymnal #579*

***Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;***

***As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.***

\*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Jesus Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made us one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between us. He created in himself one new humanity and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. Having been reconciled to him and through him, let us share his peace with one another. The peace of Christ be with you.

**And also with you.**

*Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.*

*After a few moments, liturgist will step into the lectern and say...*

**THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING**

We are entering the season in which giving becomes our primary focus. As we begin to think of the perfect gifts, the crowded malls, the unfinished shopping lists, let us pause and consider. May we lift up giving to God from the bottom of our priorities, so that we will experience freedom and joy in all our giving. Let us continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

*The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.*

THE OFFERTORY

"See Amid the Winter's Snow" - Mary McDonald

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

\*DOXOLOGY (In Unison)

*The Hymnal #592*

***Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.***

*After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...*

\*OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray...Blessed God, we stand before you offering to you what we can in anticipation of your coming again to earth. You give us much, we give you little - yet, you are gracious to bless whatever we give. Please accept these small gifts and transform them for the work of your reign on this earth, as

we make ready for the coming of our Lord. Amen.

## **THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

"The Apostle's Creed"

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.*

## **SPECIAL MUSIC**

**"Go Tell It on the Mountain"**

**The Children's Choir**

*After the soloist finishes, the preacher will return to the pulpit & say....*

Each Sunday of Advent we are using a short video produced by "The Skit Guys" to help introduce the morning message. This morning we will hear Mary's account of Jesus' birth.

## **AN ADVENT VIDEO**

**"Mary"**

*After the video, the liturgist will return to the lectern & say....*

## **SCRIPTURE READINGS**

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the seventh chapter of Second Book of Samuel, beginning at the eighth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 269 of your pew bible.

"Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; <sup>9</sup> and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup> And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup> from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. <sup>12</sup> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever."

*The liturgist will take a seat on the chancel or with the congregation.*

*When the liturgist finishes, the preacher will step into the pulpit & say...*

Our second lesson this morning is taken from the Gospel of Luke, the first chapter, beginning at the twenty-sixth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #887 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be; & the angel said to her. "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name 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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And 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 called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called

barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.”

And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”  
And the angel departed from her.”

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Our thanks be to God!**

THE SERMON

“Bringing Christ to the World”

Before we begin this morning with a discussion of how Mary is typically portrayed in Nativity scenes, I want to share with you my favorite Christmas anecdote of all time.

Not so many years ago, a young boy wanted a bicycle very badly. All his friends had one. Finally his mother suggested he take his concerns to Jesus in prayer. Johnny wrote his prayer out on a piece of paper before he went to bed, and prayed, "Dear Lord Jesus, could you see that I get a bicycle? All my friends have one. Amen." He placed the prayer next to the nativity set on the mantle and went to bed.

The next morning when he saw nothing new under the tree, and certainly nothing as large as a bike, he wasn't discouraged, and he repeated the same steps that night, and every night for the next week, with the same disappointing result.

Finally, on Christmas Eve, knowing it was his last chance for a whole year, he took the statue of Mary from the Nativity, wrapped it in a towel, and hid it in the back of his dresser drawer. and that night before going to bed, he said his prayers, and left a note by the Nativity on the mantle. The note this time though, read, "Jesus, if you want to see your mother again, I better get that bike!"

Many manger scenes show Mary as a figure down on her knees, a look of saintly adoration on her face, with a glow in the dark halo around her head; arms up and palms open in a gesture of praise and adoration of the Christ Child -- as if she has somehow just stumbled across this Divine Infant lying in the straw-filled manger. And of course, it goes without saying that the Joseph figure in the creche is an aloof kind of presence, a stalwart-looking figure pretty much devoid of emotion.

A far more authentic, accurate and emotionally articulate representation of the little family's first moments together is probably found in the work of folk artist Tom Clark of "Gnomes" fame. His version does not have Mary and Joseph kneeling and gazing at the infant in holy detachment. Rather Mary is holding the child, and Joseph is standing by her with a "goofy, new father" grin on his face.

If there is any time when the real First Family should be pictured in a hands-on relationship, it is at Christmas. For the Incarnation is when God became hands-on with us.

How can completely ordinary events, things, circumstances get raised to a higher power? How do they become sacred? The more ordinary an object or being, the more faith is required to perceive its sacred potential and miraculous qualities.

For all appearances, Mary was probably pretty ordinary looking. If she was a girl of today, she would be writing in her diary, texting her BFF's, chewing gum, and wondering if Joseph really thought she was "all of that and a bag of chips". Who could have been more ordinary than Mary, a simple, unassuming peasant girl from nowhere-Nazareth? But it is her very ordinariness that provides such a perfect foil for the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit in her life. It was in her quiet, unremarkable, day-to-day life that Mary "found favor with God." It was in the middle of all that ordinariness, that the sacred revealed itself.

It speaks to our lack of faith in the possibility of ordinary sacredness and ordinary miracles that we feel compelled to depict Mary on her knees worshipping the newborn Jesus as though he were some tiny deity that had magically materialized in her face. What we need to envision is an ordinary Mary looking pale and wan, disheveled and exhausted, but with her face transformed by joy and love as she snuggles the tiny baby Jesus tightly against her. Mary didn't gaze in respectful reverence at her newborn child. She cuddled him, counted all his fingers and toes, chuckled at the hair he did or didn't have, and wondered over the softness of his skin.

This is the true miracle of Christmas. Jesus was not some glow-in-the-dark Christ-Child. Jesus, the very God incarnate, was a real, live, ordinary, crying, cooing, sleeping, eating, wetting, pooping

baby. And just as with all babies, his greatest need was to be held in human arms, touched by human hands, soothed by human words of love and reassurance. It was the meeting, the joining, of the ordinary and the sacred. The first miracle of Christmas was not the birth of Christ, but the acquiescence to the will of God, a will she did not understand, but which she trusted enough to obey answering, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Mary's act of obedience ushers in the intersection of the eternal realm of the heavenly king with the temporal world of human life. It is in this moment, where she totally commits herself to being an instrument of Grace, that her ordinariness meets and is forever linked with the sacred.

The most surprising part of the miracle of Christmas is that we, like Mary, are included in it. Despite our lack of understanding, our seeming incapacity to contribute, we *are* real participants in the work of God in the world. It is a **miracle** that draws us into the heart of God in Christ, especially those of us who struggle to believe and respond and respond like Mary with, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

At Christmas we are all called to birth and cradle Christ in our own lives -- to wrap our arms around our faith. When we birth and cradle Christ in our own ordinary lives, we find our arms wrapping around others who need Christ birthed and cradled in their lives.

A classic story of the holy season, perfectly illustrates this miracle of ordinarily sacred:

Paul received an automobile from his brother as a Christmas present. On Christmas Eve when Paul came out of his office, a street urchin was walking around the shiny new car, admiring it.

"Is this your car, mister?" he asked.

Paul nodded. "My brother gave it to me for Christmas." The boy was astounded. "You mean your brother gave it to you and it didn't cost you nothing? Boy, I wish ...." He hesitated. Of course Paul knew what he was going to wish for. He was going to wish he had a brother like that. But what the lad said jarred Paul all the way down to his heels.

"I wish," the boy went on, "that I could be a brother like that."

Paul looked at the boy in astonishment, then impulsively he added, "Would you like to take a ride in my automobile?"

"Oh yes, I'd love that."

After a short ride, the boy turned and with his eyes aglow, said, "Mister, would you mind driving in front of my house?" Paul smiled a little. He thought he knew what the lad wanted. He wanted to show his neighbors that he could ride home in a big automobile. But Paul was wrong again.

"Will you stop where those two steps are?" the boy asked. He ran up the steps. Then in a little while Paul heard him coming back, but he was not coming fast. He was carrying his little crippled brother. He sat him down on the bottom step, then sort of squeezed up against him and pointed to the car. "There she is, Buddy, just like I told you upstairs. His brother gave it to him for Christmas and it didn't cost him a cent. And some day I'm gonna give you one just like it ... then you can see for yourself all the pretty things in the Christmas windows that I've been trying to tell you about."

Paul got out and lifted the lad to the front seat of his car. The shiny-eyed older brother climbed in beside him and the three of them began a memorable holiday ride.

That Christmas Eve, Paul learned what Jesus meant when he had said: "It is more blessed to give ...."

And the ordinary met the sacred. And Paul, and the two young brothers, and now us, discovered we DO have a brother like that, and his name is Jesus. And he has given us everything.

My holiday wish for the world is that we all could **BE** brothers like that.

Emmanuel does mean only that "God is with us." Emmanuel means God does not keep us at arm's distance. God is with us with open arms and with hands on us.

If Christ is born in us this Christmas, we too will reach with open arms to those in need; we too will have a hands-on relationship with life & love.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us pray... Lord Jesus, we give thanks for the joys of this season. We pray that you would deliver us from thinking of your coming as a distant event that took place once and has never been repeated. May we know that you are still here walking by our sides, whispering over our shoulders, smiling upon us when we need encouragement and help, and working in us and through us to fulfill the promises you have made.

Grant us Lord: The faith which is sure and certain of what it believes; The faith which unhesitatingly believes in your promises and unquestioningly accepts your commands; The faith which is loyal to you in any situation.

Give us the hope which will never despair; The hope that no disappointment can quench; The hope which in spite of failure will never give in.

Grant us the love which is always ready to forgive; The love which is always eager to help; The love which is always happier to give than to get.

And so grant that living in faith, in hope, in love, we may be faithful in all things and live the abundant life you have planned for each of us, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray saying...

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.

\*HYMN OF DEDICATION

“Go Tell It on the Mountain”

*The Hymnal #29*

\*THE BENEDICTION

\*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

“God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”

Now to the Lord sing praises all you within this place,  
And with true love & brotherhood each other now embrace;  
This holy tide of Christmas all others doth deface.

O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy; O tidings of comfort and joy.

\*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis