

Sunday, December 18, 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

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

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 Psalm 102 and printed in our bulletins?”

THE CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 102)

Hear my prayer, O Lord; and let my cry come to thee!

Thou, O Lord, art enthroned for ever; and thy name endures to all generations.

The appointed time has come for Thou to arise and have pity on Zion;

The nations will fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.

For the Lord will appear in his glory and build up Zion,

He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their supplication.

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet unborn may praise the Lord:

The Lord has looked down from his holy height, and heard the groans of the prisoners.

Let all people declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and in Jerusalem his praise!

Let the peoples and kingdoms gather together to worship the Lord.

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

LIGHTING THE FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE

The Wests 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.

Grayson: The fourth candle of Advent is the Candle of Love. Its light is meant to remind us of the love that God has for us.

Chad: Jesus shows us God’s perfect love. He is God’s love in human form. The Bible says that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Lea: Love is patient, love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful or conceited, rude or selfish.

Love is not quick to take offense, it keeps no records of wrongs, it does not gloat over other people’s troubles, but rejoices in the right, the good, and the true. There is nothing that love cannot face, there is no limit to its faith, to its hope, to its endurance. Love never fails.

Grayson: We light this candle today to remind us of how God’s perfect love is found in Jesus. (Lea lights the 4th candle).

Chad: Let us pray... Loving God, we thank you for your gift of love – shown to us perfectly in Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us prepare our hearts to receive Him so that they may provide Him a place for new beginnings and new life. Bless our worship. Help us to hear and do your Word. We ask it in the name of the one born in Bethlehem. Amen.

The Wests 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, “Once in Royal David’s City”, #49 in our *Hymnals*.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE

“Once in Royal David’s City”

The Hymnal #49

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

*CALL TO CONFESSION

Let us come away from our preoccupation with the things that have kept us from making room for Christ in our lives or for taking notice of his coming. In the confidence of our faith, let us humbly and obediently confess our sins as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving and merciful God, as we await the coming of Jesus, we confess that we do so with divided loyalties, scattered attention and idolatrous hearts. We want to welcome a baby but not surrender control of our lives to a Lord who expects our allegiance. We like the idea of having something and someone to believe in but do not want those beliefs to demand a change in our behaviors. We are inspired by brilliant stars, angelic song and the magi's gifts, but are not interested in the risky business of sharing the good news. Our lives are cluttered with parties, packages and pageantry, and in the midst of it all, we have misplaced the truth of the Incarnation-- that you have come to be with us, to know us and be known by us, to dwell not just with us but within us. Forgive us, we pray, and restore to us the joy of being yours. Amen.

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

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

The grace of God has appeared once for all, bringing salvation and manifesting the glory of our Savior. Jesus wrapped himself in human flesh and gave himself for us so that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own... 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

Because of Child of Bethlehem we have hope. And in that hope we will find peace that passes all understanding. Let us share Christ’s 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

In the generous spirit of this season, we are invited to give thanks for Gods providence with the offerings of our best. The spiritual and material needs of the world cry out for the help we can give. With glad and generous hearts, 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

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... Awesome God, thank you for the gift of your Son, and for the love and forgiveness he represents for all those who walk in darkness. For all you have entrusted to us; for your watchful care over us; for pouring out your strength upon us when loss and suffering threaten to overwhelm us; we offer these gifts and ask that you would follow them with your blessing so that all the world may be delivered into the safety and peace of your eternal kingdom. 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

"The First Noel"

John Allen Gean

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 The Innkeeper's account of Jesus' birth.

AN ADVENT VIDEO

"The Innkeeper"

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the thirteenth chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans, from the tenth to the fourteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 987 of your pew bible.

"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

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 second chapter, beginning at the first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #889 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirin'i-us was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Our thanks be to God!

THE SERMON

"What Color Is Your Christmas?"

Comedian John Simmons tells about a grade school class that was putting on a Christmas play which included the story of Mary and Joseph coming to the inn. In that class was one little boy who wanted so very much to be Joseph. But when the parts were handed out, his biggest rival was given that part, and he was assigned to be the inn-keeper instead.

He was really bitter about this, so during all the rehearsals he began to plot how to get even with his rival.

Finally, the night of the performance, Mary & Joseph came walking across the stage. They knocked on the door of the inn, and the inn-keeper opened the door and asked them gruffly what they wanted.

Joseph answered, "We'd like to have a room for the night."

Suddenly the inn-keeper threw the door wide open and said, "Great, come on in and I'll give you the best room in the house."

Now, that wasn't in the script and for a few seconds poor little kid didn't know what to do.

But finally the young Joseph had an idea. He stepped up to the innkeeper, and looked beyond him through the door that represented the inn. He made a big production of looking right and left. He stepped back out beside his "wife" and said, "No wife of mine is going to stay in dump like this. Come on, Mary, let's go to the barn."

There are times when Christmas doesn't go according to plan.

There are times when you know what the script ought to be, but somebody or something changes the lines on us.

There are times when Christmas doesn't seem as cheerful & upbeat as we had hoped it would be:

- A loved one dies
- Friends/family move away
- We struggle with divorce
- We lose our jobs
- We may face cancer or some other overwhelming disease.

What had promised to be a Christmas filled with fun and pleasure suddenly becomes a "Blue Christmas". It's the emotion reflected in the old Elvis hit:

"I'll have a blue Christmas, that's certain
And when that blue heartache starts hurting
You'll be doing all right with your Christmas of white
But I'll have a blue, blue Christmas."

In fact, there are some churches that have a "Blue Christmas" service. Their rationale is this: "The world says if you buy this present, you'll be happy and it will be all ho-ho-ho and joy to the world. For some that may be true, but there are others who ask, "What if there's no joy in my world?"

And so, these churches and their preachers have a "Longest Night" or "Blue Christmas" service.

The music is somber.

The sanctuary is dark, often lit mostly with candles.

They read depressing passages from Psalms and Lamentations.

They don't sing "Go Tell It On The Mountain" or "Joy to the World".

Melancholy piano music is the order of the day, and they decorate the Lord's Table dark blue cloth covered with dead branches to represent the winter of our souls.

I don't know about you, but I find the whole thing to be quite depressing. How hard must it be for someone who **IS** having a rough go of it, when they come to church at Christmas looking for a word of hope and find none?

That first Christmas wasn't exactly a "holly jolly Christmas".

It was the story of a teenage girl, pregnant with a child that is not her husband's.

It was the story of a child born in a dirty animal stall.

It was the story of innocent boys being killed by King Herod because Herod feared one of them might be the rival king the Wise Men spoke of.

It is the story of an innocent, sent to bring peace, who was condemned to death before he was born.

It is the story of a light sent to shine in the darkness, and the world did everything it could to snuff it out.

It is the story of God's never-ending, self-giving mercy which was rejected and condemned.

If you listen to those who favor Blue Christmas celebrations, that first Christmas was a "**blue** Christmas". If all you looked at were the things that were wrong about the birth of Jesus that's all you'd see – a blue Christmas which offered little hope and less joy.

Yes, there were going to be dark moments surrounding this young baby but they all paled in comparison to what this child was going to accomplish. Jesus had come to give light and bring salvation.

The long, dark night is almost over. Before you know it, the sun will rise and all the things that lurked in the shadows will be revealed for what they truly are, and our fear will be gone. "Salvation **is** nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night **is** far gone, the day **is** at hand."

The Christmas season isn't a time to put a dead branches on the communion table.

It isn't a time to be singing dirges and funeral hymns.

This is a time to literally rejoice

This is a time to shake the rafters with songs that speak of God's unfailing love and grace, because "God so loved the World that He gave His only begotten Son."

The world may be a harsh place to be.

People will die, move away, get divorced, get sick, lose their jobs and homes.

These are real hardships and tragedies a lot of people face, and they're going to happen to people we know, or even to us.

There may even be no room in the inn, and your life and the life of your child may be at risk, but the message from the story of Jesus' birth is this, there is no need to fear, salvation is at hand, the light is coming into your darkness and everything that filled you with terror will be seen for what it is, and your fear will be cast out. Now and forever, by the perfect love of God. It's time to wake up and live!

But if you take Jesus out of the story, and life gets blue real quick!

Back in 2005, the Ridgeway Elementary School in Dodgeville, Wisconsin decided to have a "winter program" instead of a Christmas program. And, of course, you can't have Jesus in a school program.

One of the oddest things about their "winter program" was that they sang "Silent Night". Well, it wasn't really "Silent Night"-- just the melody.

They changed the song and called it "Cold in the Night." And among the lyrics were these words:

"Cold in the night, no one in sight,

"Winter winds whirl and bite,

"How I wish I were happy and warm,

"Safe with my family out of the storm."

They took Jesus out of the story, and they put hopelessness in-- but that's what happens when you ignore the Christ child.

An empty manger leads to an empty, depressing life.

Without Jesus, life can be a depressing and even scary experience for people.

But the repeated message throughout the story about Christ's birth is this: "Wake up! Salvation is nearer to us now than ever; the night is far gone, the day is at hand.

The Bible doesn't say that everything that happens in our lives is going to be good. And not everything that happens in our lives is from God.

But if I love God, I have a PROMISE that whatever happens God will turn it to good

He came to earth to do for me – that which I could not do for myself.

I could never be good enough to be good enough for God.

I could never do enough good to outweigh the damage sin has done in my life.

When this world hurts me, and when all my carefully crafted plans fall apart-- **even then** I have a reason to have joy all the time – not just at Christmas.

Many in this world mistake Joy for Happiness. They believe that the chief goal in their lives is to be happy. And they believe that they get their happiness from what happens to them.

So that if the thing which happens to them isn't pleasant... they're not happy. They become robbed of their happiness because that something has changed the lines in their play. Life hasn't turned out the way they wanted it to. And so they'll have a blue Christmas... a blue New Year... a blue Valentines Day, etc.

But when Jesus comes into our lives, He takes the blue and changes its hue. He takes all that goes wrong in our lives and turns into a reason for joy and contentment.

Ever wonder how he does it?

The color blue shows up a lot in Scripture – mostly in the Old Testament.

It frequently is mentioned when describing the fabric & decorations in the Tabernacle and the Temple. As I prepared for this sermon, I found there was one person who always wore blue. Do you know who God always required to wear blue in the Old Testament?

The High Priest.

When the High Priest performed his service for God's people in the tabernacle, he always wore this blue robe (there were a couple of exceptions to this). Day after day, one of the distinguishing marks of the High Priest was this blue robe.

Now, there are a number of possible reasons why God may have decided to clothe His High Priest in blue. But I can think of one in particular.

The Bible tells me that Jesus is now my High Priest.

And He wears a garment of blue as well.

For Jesus reaches into my life, and yours, and takes the blues from our lives and bears them on His shoulders.

Your Christmases may be white, we may allow our greed to turn them green, our anger to color them red, but never again do you need to feel blue at Christmas.

For **HE** has borne **our** griefs, and carried **our** sorrows. And he has banished blue Christmases forever!

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us pray... Dear Heavenly Father, this time of year is especially hard on some of us. As we watch people bustling around in preparation for joyous activities, some of us are reminded of the people we have loved and lost and we are overwhelmed by our sense of loneliness. The holidays remind some of those who are absent from our lives and those absences blind us to your own warm and loving presence.

So we pray dear Jesus, that when all is darkness and we feel our weakness and helplessness, your would give us a renewed awareness of Your presence, Your love, and Your strength. Help us to have perfect trust in Your protecting love and strengthening power, so that nothing may frighten or worry us.

There are many things that we could do to be a blessing to others. Show us how to invest our time and efforts wisely. Show us how to be a blessing to others, even though we feel pain ourselves. And then O Lord, as we reach out to others, may we find our own hearts filled with your joy. Remind us of your past faithfulness so that in remembering and giving thanks for what is behind, we may rediscover your Joy in the now, and your hope for tomorrow.

Keep us always in the knowledge that Christmas is not about us and our problems. It stands as a reminder of your gift of love to the whole earth, and then, may we focus on the real reason for the season. Let the power of Jesus' love be felt through each of us, until we ourselves are called home to live in joy with you forever, or until the whole world receives and give thanks for the gift of the power of the Holy Spirit, 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

“Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne”

Sing the Faith #2100

*THE BENEDICTION

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

“Good Christian Friends, Rejoice”

Good Christian friends, rejoice, with heart and soul and voice;

Now ye hear of endless bliss: Joy! Joy! Jesus Christ was born for this!

He has opened heaven's door, And we are blest forevermore.

Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis