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Worship
December 20, 2020

(To watch the videotaped version of the worship service, click the link below)

<https://youtu.be/MG-ocd-8LcM>

GATHERING

**GREETING & ANNOUNCEMENTS
PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP**

OPENING HYMN *"Emmanuel"*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Worship is a time to learn the ways of God.

As God's love is genuine, may our love toward one another be authentic.

Worship is a time to be caught up in the Spirit of God.

We call upon God to instill within us a spirit of generosity, hospitality, and hope.

Worship is a time to nurture peacefulness within and among ourselves.

We pray for a humbleness of heart and a willingness to forgive and receive forgiveness.

May this time of worship nurture us in the ways of God.

A BRIEF CONFESSION

If we say we have no sin, if we believe we are not broken; we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

God of forgiveness, God of healing ... fill us with your truth, your grace.

We trust that your mercy is our forgiveness, your compassion our healing.

God of forgiveness, God of healing ... fill us with your truth, your grace.

We live in the power of a forgiving God.

We live in the presence of Jesus the Christ ... we are forgiven, thanks be to God. Amen.

GREETING

The Lord be with you

Be filled with the spirit of God today.

We worship to open our hearts for God's blessing.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE – 4th SUNDAY

SCRIPTURE READINGS

First Reading

Samuel 7:1-11

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.' Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.'

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus, says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' 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 to be prince over my people Israel; 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. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 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.

Second Reading

Psalm 89

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.
I declare that your steadfast love is established for ever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to my servant David:
"I will establish your descendants forever,
and build your throne for all generations."'

Selah

Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said:

**'I have set the crown on one who is mighty,
I have exalted one chosen from the people.**

**I have found my servant David;
with my holy oil I have anointed him;
my hand shall always remain with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.**

**The enemy shall not outwit him,
the wicked shall not humble him.**

**I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.**

**My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him;
and in my name his horn shall be exalted.**

**I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.**

**He shall cry to me, "You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!"**

PSALM RESPONSE - "*Forever I Will Sing*"

Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord, the goodness of the Lord.

GOSPEL READING

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him 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 ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

SERMON

4th Sunday of Advent, Dec. 20th, 2020. "Let It Be So..." Bethany

We know that the times 2,000 years ago were a far different time for women than now in our own time. Often, female children were left out in the desert to die, and for those who survived, life was hard and painful, especially for the poorest of them, the orphans and the widows. Society hardly looked at them at all. That Mary survived all of this is amazing in itself. No mention of her parents are noted in the Scriptures, and many scholars and church fathers down through the centuries have felt that perhaps Mary was an orphan that was being raised by relatives. In those days her only hope for some kind of positive future would be in a good marriage—or at least a halfway decent one. And one was arranged with an older man who was a carpenter. A man named Joseph. At least then her future was assured.

At least that's the way it seemed until that day—that moment with the angel came to her. Angels didn't seem to come to women—did they? Angels were from God, and it was said that God didn't have much to do with women...did he? Well certainly not to a poor, young orphan girl in some back-water town like Nazareth, did He?

But yet here was Gabriel right in front of Mary. Can we even begin to imagine what might have been going through Mary's mind as this angel began to speak to her? Why was he here? Why not to the priest or to the daughter of a priest? Or to the nobles in Jerusalem? Surely God would not consider sending an angel to me—would he? But indeed, God did send Gabriel to Mary, to bring her God's Word that would change her life forever—change the world forever. That she is afraid—well we would be afraid as well. Angels, well we don't see them every day—I've never seen one, that I know of for sure, through perhaps some of you have.

One of the amazing aspects of this encounter is that Mary keeps herself calm enough to think of asking questions of Gabriel like "How can this be?" and she would ponder what was taking place. I would suspect that there were other questions that arose in her mind: What is happening here? Why me? And then Gabriel goes on to tell her what is going on and that God has chosen her for a life changing, world changing event: to carry His Son. Gabriel speaks of the power of the Holy spirit; that task that the man who the child will become will proclaim God's new action in the world!

I wonder if there was a pause in the mind of Mary here. Wondering how would Joseph react to this news? Would he decide to divorce her as was his choice once he discovered she was pregnant? What then would happen to her? Often women who became pregnant out of marriage were stoned to death. Would that be her fate? Perhaps Gabriel knew these thoughts would be in the mind and heart of Mary and Gabriel reassures her with words that we in this modern world overlook all too easily: "nothing is impossible with God." All things will be OK, not easy, not without risk, not without questions, for Mary will be pondering many things in her heart concerning her Son, wondering what all of the events of his life mean. And yet in spite of all of the risks, the uncertainty, she tells Gabriel: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

And how do we respond when encountered by God? Oh, our encounters are probably not as dramatic as Mary's. More often our encounter with God comes in the form of a parent, a grandparent who brings us to worship in our younger years. And then God's word; God's challenge; God's call comes to us in a sermon; in music; in a story; in seeing injustice; being moved to compassion by the needs, the sorrow, the pain of others. We then come to meet the one whom Mary gave birth too. The one who raises the dead; who heals the sick; who gives hope to the hopeless; who brings light into the darkness of peoples lives. The one who makes us His own in our baptism and invites us to respond as Mary did so long ago: "Let it be so for us, according to your word." Indeed so. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY *"Behold"*

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

*We believe in God,
Creator of the universe,
Giver of every good gift,
Author of life itself.*

*We believe in Jesus Christ,
who reminded us of the coming of God's kingdom,
who commanded us to care for those in need,
who taught us to store up treasures in heaven, not on earth,
and who gave us the example of self-giving love.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who inspires us to faithful stewardship of God's gifts and
that God has given us gifts to be shared freely and generously, in a spirit of love and joy.
We believe that faithful stewardship is an act of worship,
a means of praising God who has blessed us abundantly.
We believe that God has great things in store for us,
for it is in giving that we receive. AMEN*

(Allen & Sara Ewing-Merrill, 2004)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... bless our lives, lead us in your ways, gives us hearts for gratitude and service. Fill us with your grace, that what we desire is also what you desire. Grant us the understanding that our hearts' true desire is the love of you. May the love of Christ urge us on, may we walk by faith. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... bless those who govern. Bless the leaders of nations, countries, towns, and cities. Bless all those who lead in all manner of ways – social, political, and religious. Fill the hearts of all with your wisdom. Guide us in the way of justice and integrity for all. Guide us to walk by faith. Holy God, tend to those who suffer in mind, body, and spirit. Tend to the tired, the dying, the poor and the hungry. Help us to follow the love of Christ, a love which urges us on to seek and serve Christ in others. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... We pray for Bethany members on our prayer list. Give them the blessing of your presence amid their times of trial. We pray for our congregation in this time of suspended worship that we will still continue to be a committed community of faith seeking to be the light of Jesus in our community and world. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... We pray for our world in a time of pandemic and societal distress and change. Give our leaders wisdom, compassion, insight, and courage to lead in ways that serve all the people under their charge. We pray for doctors and nurses, EMT's, and all those on the frontline of healthcare amid this COVID-19 pandemic. Give them health, energy, compassion, and the strength to care for those struggling with illness and hospitalization. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Listen to each of us, Lord, as we come to you in a moment of silent prayer

Into your hands, great and compassionate God, we commend all for whom and about which we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offering (Please mail your weekly offering to the church - 4300 N 82nd St. Scottsdale, AZ 85251)

PRAYER OF BLESSING

God of all blessing, giver of all good gifts; day by day you shower us with what we need to live and prosper. With glad and generous hearts and in a response of thanksgiving, we return a portion of our wealth. May what we give be a symbol of our gratitude and a blessing of your love for those who may be helped through our offering. AMEN

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory, forever and ever. AMEN.**

SENDING

Benediction

People of God, look for Jesus!

Seek him as a treasure in this great wide world.

Seek him in the eyes of your loved ones and in the eyes of strangers.

May your heart burn within you as the Lord draws close to you this week.

Closing Hymn *"People, Look East"*

DISMISSAL

P *Go in peace to live and serve in the way of the cross.*

C **Thanks be to God!**