

The Visitor - December 2020



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A Few Advent Thoughts

“Advent Essence”

It isn't about waiting for baby Jesus
 to be born again
 swaddled in a sty
 and it isn't about waiting for Christ
 to return again
 from a cloud in the sky
 It's about us deepening into God's kingdom
 – liberated life for you and I.
 ~ Roger Wolsey

Advent does not begin in buoyancy
 or celebration
 or in a shopping spree.
 The natural habitat of Advent is a
 community of hurt.
 It is the voice of those who know
 profound grief,
 who articulate it and not cover it up.
 ~Walter Brueggemann

Advent is not the kind of “preparation” that
 involves shopping and parties and cards.
 Such illusions of abundance disguise the true
 cravings of our weary souls.

Advent is preparation for the demands of
 newness that will break the tired patterns of
 fear in our lives.
 ~Walter Brueggemann


The Advent journey: Hope becomes peace.
 Peace becomes joy. Joy becomes love.
 Love becomes Christ.
 ~Bobby Schuller

This Advent season begins amid pandemic &
 protest. We are being reminded that to be the
 people of God requires an ethical posture of
 attentiveness, to "keep awake."
 ~ Marcia Riggs

A waiting person is a patient person. The word
 patience means the willingness to stay where
 we are and live the situation out to the full in
 belief that something hidden there will
 manifest itself to us.
 ~ Henri Nouwen

Then the Grinch thought of something
 he hadn't before!
 What if Christmas, he thought,
 doesn't come from a store!
 What if Christmas...perhaps...
 means a little bit more!
 ~Dr. Seuss

Be well, be blessed, be a blessing,
 Pastor Martha



12/02 Edna Souder
 12/03 Kim Hurley
 12/07 Bill Anderson
12/08 Ida Anderson (100!)
 12/18 Zachary Niemi
 12/27 Doug Kendall

REMINDER

TIME AND TALENT AND ESTIMATE OF GIVING CARDS

We are still collecting Time and Talent and Estimate of Giving Cards. We need help to keep things going now more than ever. We have had a few returned *without names*, so don't forget to turn them over and fill out the back side. Thank you!

EDUCATION

THURSDAY BOOK STUDY

With Susan Thornton

The Thursday Study Group is meeting via Zoom. We are reading Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Other by Barbara Brown Taylor. If you would like to join us, we are reading and discussing Chapters 5 and 6 when we meet on **December 3 at 1:30.**


The first chapter is called Nearest Neighbors... Judaism and the next chapter is about loving the stranger. In **January (7th) again at 1:30**, we will discuss chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 7 is an introduction to Islam and 8 discusses the failures of Christianity.

If you are not on our class email, forward you email address to me at thorntonsl@aol.com. I will add you to the class list and you will receive an invitation to the zoom meeting the week before we meet. We will always meet on the first Thursday of the month at 1:30 pm.

Susan Thornton

OUTREACH

THANKSGIVING BASKETS



Thank you to all who helped make Thanksgiving better for twelve families in our area. We received many generous donations, a Thrivent grant and funds from Outreach to purchase dinner for the holiday as well as many additional items such as kitchen staples, paper products, ingredients for several other meals and a gift certificate to get perishable items. The families are very grateful and appreciate our generosity.



ADULT BIBLE STUDY

Led by Laura Trombley

We will continue our Lectionary Bible Study of the readings for each Sunday. A Microsoft Teams meeting invitation (a link) is being sent out weekly for anyone interested in joining on Sunday mornings at 10:05am.

Please have your bible handy, and we promise our time for study will remain under 45 minutes. The December study guides are included in this newsletter. If you have missed any of our previous bible studies feel free to go to our FaceBook page and watch them.

PRAYER REQUESTS

We have updated our prayer list. If someone was taken off the list that still needs our prayers, please let Pastor Martha or Anna know and we will gladly add them back onto the list. Thank you.



BIBLE STUDY FOR 12-13-2020

Daily Discipleship

Third Sunday of Advent (B) – John 1:6-8, 19-28

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Expectant*

Focus Question: *What are you expecting this Advent season?*

word of life

“He came to testify to the light.” John 1:28 (NRSV)

Read John 1:6-8, 19-28

Once again we meet John the Baptist, in this instance through the words of the Gospel writer of John. Like the writer of Mark, the writer of John emphasizes John the Baptist’s uniqueness.

Unlike Mark’s description of the Baptizer, the writer of John focuses not on John’s unique attire and diet, but rather on John the Baptist’s unique role in the Good News story of Jesus. John is to expectantly bear witness to Jesus, the light of the world.

Clearly, John had a strong following of disciples. Mark’s Gospel indicates that “people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him” (Mark 1:5 NRSV). He obviously stirred the expectations of the people, so much so that the Jewish leaders sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” (John 1:19 NRSV)

Even more clear is John the Baptist’s own understanding of his role. He is not the promised, expected Messiah. He is not Elijah, taken up to heaven in a chariot and expected to return to be the forerunner of the Messiah. Nor is he “the prophet” – one like Moses who was expected to fulfill the law, leading, and guiding the people. No, John’s singular role is to testify to the light – to prepare for One who is to come. His message of expectation and witness echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Make straight the way of the Lord.” (John 1:23 NRSV; Isaiah 40: 3)

1. *What are some of the roles you have in your daily life?*
2. *What is your role as a disciple of Jesus?*
3. *What are some of the expectations associated with those roles? Are they clear to you?*

“The light” is rich with symbolism in John’s Gospel. It is God’s creative, life-giving Word, active and present in a dark world. (See John 1:1-5) John the Baptist’s role is to serve as a window to that light, pulling back the curtain so the light could be seen.

Through his call to “make straight the way of the Lord” (John 1:23 NRSV), John the Baptist paves the road for Jesus. He challenges people to clean the film and dust of sin away so the light can be brightly seen.

Note that the One John the Baptist anticipates (and about whom he testifies) is already present and “stands among you.” (John 1:26 NRSV) John’s role is secondary to the one who comes after him. John is not worthy to “untie the thong of his sandal” – a humble act of a servant or slave.

John the Baptist’s witness and expectation comes to fulfillment in Jesus. As the gospel story continues, the next day John sees Jesus coming toward him and he declares, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29 NRSV)

For John and for the disciples of every age, testimony bears fruit. Expectation finds fulfillment. All in the person of Jesus, the light of the world.

4. *How does Jesus fulfill your expectations?*

word among us

“Expectation.” It’s an interesting word. We speak of a young woman anticipating the birth of a child as “expecting.” We use it to articulate that which we anticipate. Expectations are not “pie-in-the-sky” hopes and dreams with no basis in reality; rather, there is a certain level of confidence that the anticipated hope will reach fulfillment.

1. *What do you expect might happen this week?*
2. *How confident are you that your expectations will become reality?*

There is a saying often heard from teachers and counselors: the measure of what people will achieve often reflects the expectations others have of them. Expect low results, and the person will live down to them. Expect great things, and the person is challenged to stretch and grow.

3. *What do you expect of a disciple of Christ?*
4. *What might God’s expectation be?*

John the Baptist had high expectations. He anticipated the coming of the Christ. His life’s mission – his life’s expectation – was that of pointing to the promised Messiah. Time and again, he directed attention away from himself and toward Jesus. Even though others didn’t readily recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of their expectations, he tirelessly said, “Look around. See the Christ who is present, in your midst!”

As disciples of Christ, our life’s expectation – like John the Baptist – is also to point to Jesus. We are called to look with confidence into the future and anticipate the fulfillment of God’s promises. We are called to look with confidence into the present and point out how God is here, active and moving. We are called to look with confidence into the past and bear witness to how God has been at work, even when we failed to see it at the time. Past, present, and future – all full of expectation!

5. *How is God here, active, and moving in your life?*
6. *How is God here, active, and moving in the life of the church?*

All this looking is directed not to ourselves but to the One who is the true light, Jesus Christ. The gospel writer of John offers a wonderful description of the attitude of a disciple: to be “a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.” (John 1:7-8 NRSV)

7. *How might you expect God to be present in your life this week?*
 8. *How might you point to the true life, Jesus Christ, during the week? What might prevent you from doing so?*
- How can you support others as they strive to testify to the light of Christ?*

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus and be our guest. Grant us expectant hearts, that we might bear witness to your coming in our midst. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

last word

This week, be aware of your expectations of yourself and others.



Daily Discipleship

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BIBLE STUDY FOR 12-20-2020

Daily Discipleship

Fourth Sunday of Advent (B) – Luke 1:26-38

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Trusting*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to trust God as a faithful disciple?*

word of life

“Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Luke 1:38 (NRSV)

Read Luke 1:26-38

The story of Jesus’ birth begins to be told this Fourth Sunday in Advent. It is a story of an extraordinary visitation of an angel who tells of a miraculous conception, yet it is rooted in an ordinary town (Nazareth) and in a common young girl (Mary) whose simple faith and trust stand throughout the ages as a model of faithful discipleship.

The timing of the angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary (known in the church calendar as the “annunciation” – the “announcement”) is identified within the context of the story of the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. “In the sixth month” (Luke 1:26 NRSV) refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s (Mary’s cousin) pregnancy. It might be helpful to read Luke’s account of the announcement of John’s birth (Luke 1:5-25).

1. *What similarities do you see in the two accounts? What differences?*

The angel Gabriel begins with a common word of greeting (translated “greetings” or “hail”), but the remainder of Gabriel’s message is anything but ordinary! Mary is addressed as “favored one,” and when Mary seems perplexed by what the greeting means, the angel assures her, “Don’t be afraid,” and again says to her, “You have found favor with God.” (Luke 1:30 NRSV)

2. *What is the significance for Mary of having found “favor with God”?*

3. *What reassurance does this give us when we contemplate what God is calling us to do as disciples?*

Gabriel then gets to the heart of his message. Mary will conceive and give birth to a child – no ordinary child, to be sure, but “the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32 NRSV). This child is clearly identified as the promised Messiah – the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah’s prophecy. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Mary’s initial response is that of puzzlement: “How can this be?” She is but a young girl who has not had sexual relations. The answer: through the power of the Holy Spirit which will “come upon” and “overshadow” her.

The word “overshadow” (Luke 1:35) is the same word used in the Old Testament to describe God’s presence resting on the tabernacle in the pillar of cloud in the Sinai desert (Exodus 40:35). And just as the Spirit moved over the waters of creation, bringing forth life out of nothing, so God’s Spirit will move again to bring about something new.

Mary’s response is one of obedient trust. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38 NRSV). Her question, “How can this be?” is turned into an affirmation of trust, “Let it be so.” In a few short phrases, the plan of God is revealed. Just as God is able to bring about the birth of John in Elizabeth (who is beyond child-bearing years), God is able to accomplish the virgin birth of Jesus through Mary. “For nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37 NRSV)

word among us

“Who, me? You’ve got to be kidding!” “Why ... We’ve never done it like that before.” “I don’t think I can do that!” “Are you sure you want me?”

Sound familiar? We often speak similar words when presented with an opportunity to stretch, to go beyond our “comfort zones,” to dare to venture out into uncharted territory. Change and challenge are difficult. They bring anxiety and confusion; they can turn our world upside down.

We can identify with Mary’s initial response to the angel’s announcement that she was to give birth to the Christ. Our text tells us she was “much perplexed” and needed time to ponder just what all the commotion was about (Luke 1:29). Her first words were a question: “How can this be?” (Luke 1:34 NRSV)

1. *Recall a time when you were challenged and stretched to do something new. How did you respond?*

The angel Gabriel reminded Mary of the power of God’s Holy Spirit – the same power that through God’s word brought life out of nothing in creation, the same power that brought budding life to elderly Elizabeth. With this Spirit, the impossible is possible. And Mary’s words quickly changed from a question, “How can this be?” to an affirmation of willing trust: “Let it be with me according to your word.”

2. *Take a moment and silently meditate on Mary’s prayer. What thoughts come to mind?*

As faithful disciples of Christ, we, too, have been called to do new and exciting things. God has blessed us with unique gifts and talents, and God has placed us in opportunities to use and share the gifts. We may wonder at times whether we have the right “stuff” to do what we are called to do. The task often seems impossible. We know ourselves only too well – our weaknesses, our failings, our lack of experience.

Even as we speak our doubts and reservations, we hear the story of two women: Elizabeth, too old to conceive; and Mary, too young. If God’s Spirit was able to move in each of them to do the impossible, who knows what “impossible” ventures God is birthing within you? The angel’s assurance to Mary is also a word of comfort to each of us: “Don’t be afraid, for you have found favor with God. The Holy Spirit will be with you.”

May our response be as Mary’s: “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38 NRSV)

3. *How does an attitude of trust develop?*

4. *What are some barriers which block us from trusting God?*

5. *How might we incorporate Mary’s prayer in our daily life?*

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus and be our guest. Grant us bold and trusting faith, that we might be instruments and bearers of your love. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 9: 2-7

last word

Each day this week, pray Mary’s prayer:
“Let it be with me according to your word.”



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BIBLE STUDY FOR 12-27-2020

Daily Discipleship

First Sunday of Christmas (B) – Luke 2:22-40

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Peace-filled*

Focus Question: *How does being a disciple bring peace?*

word of life

“Now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word.”

Luke 2:29 (NRSV)

Read Luke 2:22-40

The context for this reading from Luke’s Gospel is the Temple in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph are upholding the religious laws by observing the ritual act of purification after the birth of a child (See Leviticus 12), and the required consecration of the first-born son to the Lord (Exodus 13:2). They travel to Jerusalem in obedience to the law of Moses. By their actions, it is clear that Mary and Joseph are devout people. It is also clear they are poor; they offer a sacrifice prescribed for those who could not afford to offer a lamb —— turtledoves and pigeons. (Luke 2: 24)

It is in this holy place, in the act of holy ritual, that the reader is introduced to Simeon and Anna.

Both are near the end of their earthly life. Both are identified as godly people. Simeon is described as being “righteous and devout” (Luke 2:25 NRSV), and Anna “never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:37 NRSV). Both lived a life of expectation. Simeon is “looking forward to the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25 NRSV), and Anna speaks about child Jesus as the promised Messiah who will bring the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38).

1. *What are Simeon and Anna waiting for in their lifetime?*
2. *What is it like to have your waiting fulfilled?*

The theme of “seeing” permeates the story. As Jesus is brought to the Temple by his parents, both Simeon and Anna recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promises, right before their own eyes. Anna tells of the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem; Simeon proclaims that his eyes have seen God’s salvation — a light for revelation to the whole world.

3. *What does “God’s salvation” mean?*

Simeon also “sees” the path of suffering and opposition Jesus will face (Luke 2:34-35). Jesus will be in the Temple again as an adult, challenging the religious leaders. A sacrifice will again be offered — the sacrifice of Jesus’ life.

4. *How might Mary have felt after hearing all of Simeon’s words?*

As Simeon realizes the fulfillment of the hoped-for Messiah, his words reflect a sense of completion: “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word” (Luke 2:29 NRSV). Expectation leads to fulfillment, and fulfillment brings peace.

5. *How did Simeon have an attitude of peace?*
6. *What brings you peace?*

Simeon’s words may sound familiar to you. They are sometimes sung as the canticle following Holy Communion in the liturgy. (See *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Page 113, Hymns 200-203) As disciples in worship receive the very real presence of Christ in the meal, we, along with Simeon, know the fulfillment of God’s promises — personally, intimately, right before our eyes. We can go forth in peace to serve the Lord.

word among us

She had served as the organist in the small country church for over half a century. Her father had been one of the early settlers of the community. His skills as a carpenter are still evident in the sturdy beams of the wood-framed church building he helped to shape.

She was a devout woman – faithful in her actions and words. In her later years, her hands – once nimble and sure on the keyboard – were gnarled with arthritis, making it impossible for her to play. Yet even though her hands were stilled, her voice still sang the hymns of faith she had known since childhood.

She spent the last years of her life in a nursing home. Many of those days were spent bed-ridden, waiting. She waited for the promises to come to fulfillment — promises made to her when she was but an infant, promises taught to her in her childhood, promises studied and affirmed as an adult. She waited to be taken home.

When the end finally came, her family and friends gathered in the church she so loved to hear the promises yet again. The same organ she had played for those many decades sang out glorious proclamations of a sure and certain hope, of promises fulfilled. And the same words she so ably assisted the congregation to sing were now offered as a prayer for her: “Lord, now you let your servant go in peace, for your word has been fulfilled.”

Her waiting was over. The promises were fulfilled. God’s faithful servant was at rest. And even though there was grief expressed, somehow all was well. Somehow, there was completion. Somehow, there was peace.

1. *Whom do you know who is waiting?*
2. *What will does it mean at the end of life “to go in peace”?*
3. *What helps us to wait?*

And what of us? And our waiting? Let us join the prayers of the faithful of ages past as we pray, “Lord, now you let your servant go in peace, for your word has been fulfilled.”

4. *What do you wait for at this time in your life?*
5. *How do God’s promises give you peace?*
6. *What disrupts your attitude of peace?*
7. *Does peace necessarily mean passivity? Explain.*
8. *What is the lesson from this passage?*

Prayer

Christ Jesus, Prince of Peace, our longed-for Savior, come to us. Grant us peace. Amen

Dig Deeper

Ephesians 2:13-15



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Jan Lehman and Robin Vogel	Rev. Martha Porter-Reid
Jim Skrocki	Anna Pedrotte
Tim Ernst	Parish Administrator
	Tech Director
	Organist
	Custodians

Staff Listing:

Sundays at 9:30 a.m. – Worship Service with Holy Communion

Worship with us:

“We are a grace-centered family of faith that seeks to know Christ and make Him known.”

St. James Lutheran Church
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