



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
 Wilton, WI
 Fourth Sunday of Advent
 December 20, 2020
**Inviting People to
 Journey with Christ's Family**

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*The Sunday Assembly, Lorraine S. Brugh, Gordon W. Lathrop, Augsburg Fortress, 2008
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God keeps the promise made to David to give him an everlasting throne. The angel tells Mary that God will give David's throne to her son Jesus. She is perplexed by Gabriel's greeting and by the news of her coming pregnancy, but she is able still to say, "Count me in." We who know that Jesus is called king only as he is executed still find it a mystery hard to fathom, but with Mary today we hear the news of what God is up to and say, "Count us in."

People, Look East

1 Peo - ple, look east. The time is near of the crown - ing
 2 Fur - rows, be glad. Though earth is bare, one more seed is
 3 Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim, one more light the
 4 An - gels an - nounce with shouts of mirth him who brings new

of the year. Make your house fair as you are a - ble,
 plant - ed there. Give up your strength the seed to nour - ish,
 bowl shall brim, shin - ing be - yond the frost - y weath - er,
 life to earth. Set ev - 'ry peak and val - ley hum - ming

trim the hearth and set the ta - ble. Peo - ple, look
 that in course the flow'r may flour - ish. Peo - ple, look
 bright as sun and moon to - geth - er. Peo - ple, look
 with the word, the Lord is com - ing. Peo - ple, look

east, and sing to - day— Love, the Guest, is on the way.
 east, and sing to - day— Love, the Rose, is on the way.
 east, and sing to - day— Love, the Star, is on the way.
 east, and sing to - day— Love, the Lord, is on the way.

***Prayer of the Day**

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

WORD

*God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.**

FIRST READING

Instead of David building a house (temple) for God, God promises to establish David's house (dynasty) forever. Centuries later, after the Babylonian exile, no king sat on the throne. Even then, however, the people of Israel remembered this promise and continued to hope for a king, the messiah, God's anointed.

A reading from 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

¹Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the 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." ³Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you."

⁴But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I 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. ⁷Wherever 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?" ⁸Now 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; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you

IN OUR PRAYERS

Katie Wallace, Judy Bever, Darlene and Paul Babbitt, Pam Eaton, Alrita Ornes, Frank Wendt, Jeff (Scott) DeCharme, Harvey Menn, Tessa Klipstein, Lisa Rhodes, Annette Udulutch, Jim Finer, Bud Osteboe.

IN THE MILITARY

Jacob Picha, Todd Nofsinger, Dylan Dougherty, Seth Tormoen, Robert Cale

CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Mon., Dec. 21 | "Blue Christmas Virtual Service" | |
| Thurs., Dec. 24 | Drive-in Worship | 2:30 PM & 5:30 PM |

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Prepare the Royal Highway



1 Pre - pare the roy - al high - way; the King of kings is near!
2 God's peo - ple, see him com - ing; your own e - ter - nal king!
3 Then fling the gates wide o - pen to greet your prom - ised king!
4 His is no earth - ly king - dom; it comes from heav'n a - bove.



Let ev - 'ry hill and val - ley a lev - el road ap - pear!
Palm branch - es strew be - fore him! Spread gar - ments! Shout and sing!
Your king, yet ev - 'ry na - tion its trib - ute too may bring.
His rule is peace and free - dom and jus - tice, truth, and love.



Then greet the King of glo - ry, fore - told in sa - cred sto - ry:
God's prom - ise will not fail you! No more shall doubt as - sail you!
All lands will bow be - fore him; their voic - es join your sing - ing:
So let your praise be sound - ing for kind - ness so a - bound - ing:



Refrain
Ho - san - na to the Lord, for he ful - fills God's word!

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

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. ¹⁰And 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, ¹¹from 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. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Luke 1:46b-55

^{46b}My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
⁴⁷my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸for 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.
⁵⁰You 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,
⁵²casting 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.
⁵⁴You have come to the aid of your servant Israel,
to remember the promise of mercy,
⁵⁵the promise made to our forbears,
to Abraham and his children forever.

SECOND READING

Paul closes his letter to the Romans by praising God because, in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God has revealed the promised, divine plan of salvation for all humanity. Paul proclaims this gospel of Christ in order to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations.

A reading from Romans 16:25-27

²⁵Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL READING

In this annunciation, Luke makes clear that God comes with good news for ordinary people from little known places. This king will not be born to royalty in a palace, but to common folk in a stall. Here Luke highlights the role of the Spirit, a special emphasis in this gospel.

The gospel according to Luke 1:26-38

Glory to you, O Lord.

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God

Gracious God, all generations call you blessed. In this holy season we pray for our neighbors of other denominations and faiths. Inspire the faith of their people. Cultivate understanding among us and strengthen us in love and service to our community. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Creator God, you scatter the proud. Everything we have belongs first to you. Bless and protect the seas, mountains, plains, forests, skies, and soils that surround us. Give us humility as we tend them. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Righteous God, you humble the powerful and lift up the lowly. We pray for the leaders of all nations, that they amplify the voices of people in need. Guide all people entrusted with leadership, to create societies in which everyone can flourish. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Compassionate God, you fill the hungry with good things and encourage those with plenty to give of advocates, community organizers, and food pantries. Encourage all to lift up and provide for their neighbors in need. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Healing God, you pour out mercy to all who cry out to you. Surround everyone in need of healing in body, mind, or spirit with your tender presence especially Katie Wallace, Carla Von Haden, Ruth Johnson, Judy Bever, Alrita Ornes, Lisa Rhodes, Pam Liefke, Frank Wendt, Jeff (Scott) DuCharme, Harvey Menn, Annette Udulutch, Jim Finer, Paul and Darlene Babbitt, Bud Osteboe, and those we name aloud and in our hearts. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Eternal God, you are faithful to the promises you made to our forebears. We give thanks for the ministry of Katharina von Bora Luther and other ancestors who organized, planned, dreamed, encouraged, and reached out as they served you. We give thanks for the bold leadership of female leaders in our own time. Inspire the children and youth of your church to hear your call, so they may someday serve as pastors, deacons, lay leaders, Sunday school teachers and musicians. Inspire others with their steadfast witness. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

will see in the virgin's birth, the light of Christ in that manger in Bethlehem. Because our lives of faith move us to believe that God is with us even during the darkest of times. God is with us during the great surprises of life. God is with us during times of change and uncertainty. And God uses us. God uses us, whether we are young or old, rich or poor, no matter what our descriptors may be, no matter what other human beings may say or think about us. God uses us: people of faith, to create his kingdom on earth. God's kingdom, filled with the hope, peace, joy and love that the Christ child brings. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

God of power and might, comfort your people and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The 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. ³⁶And 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. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then 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.

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon

Our Old Testament scripture passage from 2 Samuel, takes us back to the reign of King David. Now that David is established in Jerusalem, in his Royal City, he wants to build God a house in which to dwell. But, God has other plans. God has been without a permanent house, and God has no need of one at this time! Per God's instructions, David does not build the temple. Instead, God promises to build a house for David! But this house is not a brick-and-mortar one: God promises David an enduring dynasty through David's royal lineage.

In our gospel passage today, we hear about the fulfillment of God's promise to David. The angel, Gabriel, tells Mary that God will give David's throne to her son, Jesus. Gabriel states, "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" (vs. 32-33, NRSV)

The historical context for our gospel reading today, reminds us that in ancient times, men and women had prescribed roles and expectations. A man's profession would be the same as that of his father, his father's father, and his father's father before him. (That is why Jesus, as a young man, was a carpenter like his earthly father, Joseph.) As for women, they were to have children and

to assist in providing sustenance for the family. As for marriage, one's parents sought out a suitable spouse, and a marriage was arranged. This was the common practice and societal norm. Neither the soon-to-be bride or groom had a say in the matter. Something that impacted the lives of most men and women, for which we today would expect to have a choice, in ancient times, they had no choice.

Mary is a girl of perhaps 12-14 years of age, whose marriage to Joseph has been arranged by their parents. She, like other girls who had reached child-bearing age, expected to be married and to have children after marriage. This was her prescribed role, and her expected role. Tradition dictated it. Societal norms encouraged it. And, anything outside of these norms was questioned. Yet, what Mary experienced through the appearance of the angel, and his words to her, set her apart from all other women then and now. She is a virgin, yet she will be a mother. She is to give birth to a son who is fully human and fully divine. This news has been proclaimed to her, by an angel. She has been chosen, she has been "highly favored" by God, and she has been granted the joy of being the mother of God!

We recognize Mary's faithfulness in her response. We do not hear Mary making excuses about why she can't do what the angel has proclaimed. (She does not say...How will this look to other people? Who is going to believe that I am a virgin? How will I explain this to Joseph, to my parents, to my friends and other family members?) We know that Mary was perplexed, wondering how this could be. We know that Mary might have been afraid upon hearing the angel's revelation. (She could have asked, why me? Why do I need to be the one for this role? There are many other girls and women in the world who could give birth to a child. Why me?)

But even though she was perplexed, even though she pondered how she could have been selected, Mary's great faith in God gives her peace. Her great faith in God, gives her comfort. Her great faith in God, gives her the ability to not question her role and to not question God! Her great faith allows her to accept that even though she is poor, unmarried, and a teenage girl, she is the one whom God has chosen! She has been selected from all the women on earth to be Jesus' mother! Her social position, her marital status, her lineage, her lack of education, and all of the reasons that human beings might raise against her selection, are null and

void. This is not an example of selection based on earthly wealth and power. This is a story of faith! It is a story of Mary's great faith in God, which has allowed her to find favor with God. It is about Mary believing the angels words: "For nothing will be impossible with God" (vs. 37). It is about Mary's trust in God, which allows her to proclaim, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." (vs. 38)

The angel's proclamation is the message of a tremendous change that is to come! It is unlike any that has ever been heard. God had tried many times since God created Adam and Eve, to instruct human beings. God spoke directly to Moses, to Elijah, and to others throughout history. He sent other prophets. He allowed the Israelite people to have kings, including King David. He watched and waited, as over and over again, the people sinned and fell short of his hopes for them. But, God promised after the flood, that he would never again destroy his people by the waters of a flood. As the rainbow after the flood reminds us, God chose to work with us, and God continues to choose to work with us. God chose to work with us, even when we did not deserve it. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life." (John 3:16, KJV) God has plans for all that God has created. God has plans for the well-being of God's people. God has plans for Mary, and God has plans for us. For as the angel announced, God the Father will send God's son to earth, so that all who believe in him may experience God's forgiveness, grace, and salvation. This is the will of God!

How has our faith in God been tested, strengthened, and shaped throughout our lives? How do we respond, when we feel God calling us to do something that leaves us perplexed? Do we make excuses? Do we say, "How can this be?" Do we ask, "Why me?" Do we try to ignore God's message? Or do we place our faith, our total trust in God and God's will for us! We, like David, may want to do something, but God has other plans. We, like Mary, may have thought that societal norms and traditions dictated one's life and what one could become. But God has other plans. When God directs us, we move from self-control to God control. We move from our own limited understandings and ways of doing things, to fulfilling God's desires for us. For God loves us. God loves us so much, that the angel tells Mary that she will bear the Son, Jesus, the Messiah, through the work of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus will model for all the world, the hope, peace, joy and love that only our Lord and Savior can bring.

Are we ready to hear God's call in our own lives? The year 2020 has been a year of great change. But for people of faith, it is also a time of great hope for the future! Advent season is nearing its end, and the Christmas season will soon be here when we celebrate Jesus' birth. People of faith throughout the world will sing praises to God's holy name. People of faith