

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BAYFIELD

December 19, 2021

May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you ... **and also with you.** Welcome to worship at Knox Presbyterian Bayfield on this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, December 19.

**Announcements**

The people of Knox Bayfield acknowledge that our community worships, lives, plays, and works on the traditional lands of the Anishinabewaki, Attiwonderonk (Neutral), and Mississauga peoples within Treaty 29, of 1827.

**HYMN Hope is a star #119**

**CALL TO WORSHIP [responsive] Insert**

**PRAYER OF ADORATION AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON<sup>1</sup>**

O God, our spirits rejoice in you this day. Your mercy is known from generation to generation. And so, we praise your holy name with hearts full of gratitude, trusting you will continue to do great things through Christ.

God of life and love, the stories of Advent remind us that you are a God of surprises. You surprised Elizabeth with news she would have a child late in life. You surprised Mary with news she would mother the Messiah. Your surprises overturned their lives. We hear their stories and realize we do not always meet life's surprises with the same courage. Forgive us when we hesitate to greet you in the unexpected. Forgive us when we prefer routine over new possibilities. Amen

God's forgiveness shines into the world and the darkness scatters. Jesus knows our every strength ... our every weakness and loves us still. We are called to the promise of God's amazing grace. Thanks be to God.

May the peace of Jesus the Christ, which surpasses all understanding, be with you.

**And also with you.**

**To Hear The Word Of God**

**Prayer For Illumination**

O Mighty One, by your Holy Spirit may your Word leap in us. We yearn for the joy that comes with new beginnings and renewed lives. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> PCC Worship Planner Advent December 2021 Year C

**Hymn      We cannot own the sunlit sky      #717**

### **Reaching Out**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God.

The season of Advent calls for patience during a time of transitions between the past and the present. Our hope, our struggles, our disappointments and our dreams are reflected in the stories of Advent. During this time that marks the beginning of our church calendar, we wait for the child that we know was born so long ago as we know that God is alive among us and we wait for the time of Christ's return. The scripture readings shift from one age to the next.

In the gospel this morning we heard of the visit that took place with Mary and Elizabeth. When Mary arrived the not-yet-born John responded by leaping for joy in Elizabeth's womb. It was not a simple kick or two. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy." The baby kicking drew the two women into a deeper awareness and understanding of unfolding events. The coming of the Messiah was anticipated and proclaimed by these marginalized, pregnant women. Mary, young and unwed. Elizabeth, far beyond the age to conceive. They met and shared news of their miraculous pregnancies. In the willingness of these women to embrace their faith the world would be turned upside down, hierarchies would be toppled, and the powerful brought down. Two marginalized, pregnant women carried the future to proclaim the Messiah.

Calvin wrote, "There is nothing we should reckon odd in her seeking to confirm her faith by going to see the miracle which the angel had effectively brought to her notice. The faithful may be satisfied with the unadorned Word of God, and yet neglect none of his works which they realize provide support for their faith. Mary was above all right to seize upon the help afforded her, if she did not wish to reject what the Lord had deliberately put before her."

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Guided by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth's prophetic voice shared her understanding of Mary's special role with the Messiah. Mary, strengthened and encouraged by Elizabeth, shared her Magnificat as she sang the prophetic words. The Magnificat celebrates the greatness and covenantal faithfulness of God. God's mercy and strength would scatter the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God would bring down the powerful and lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty. God was faithful to the covenant. W. Tozer wrote, "The greatness of God rouses fear within us, but His goodness encourages us not to be afraid of Him. To fear and not be afraid—that is the paradox of faith."

In her song we hear of God's goodness in action, the grace and the mercy of God. Mary bears witness to the grace of God, who has done great things in her life. God is with those on the margins and fills the hungry with good things. God provided Mary and Elizabeth with community and connection when they were isolated by the restraints within their culture. They were able to develop deeper understanding of their individual journeys and the long-lasting impact they would have on the world. Together they see more clearly than they could as individuals. In this we discover a deep message of hope and understanding created within relationship.

This passage drew my thoughts to the isolation experienced during this dreadful ongoing pandemic. Just as we began to feel a sense of growing comfort in gathering, the COVID infection numbers began to rise. In our anticipation of gathering with friends and family, especially during Christmas week, the provincial restrictions have tightened. How does this story of two women experiencing unexpected pregnancies connect with us in our time? Perhaps it is in their ability to reach out to one another in a time of need. Their ability to recognize the movement of the Holy Spirit within their connection. Their need to share their stories and to accept the loving support offered.

There are many ways to reach out. The written word, the telephone, the use of virtual technology. It is different than being with one another in the traditional ways, yet, we are still able to connect. A Christmas card, a letter, or an email that can be read and re-read. Thankfully, in the midst of the pandemic, this congregation felt the urge to explore new ways of reaching out. It continues to astound me that we can worship in this sanctuary and reach people in their homes through a computer program, a camera, and ...

Prepared for Knox Presbyterian Church, Box 565, Bayfield, ON N0M 1G0

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Minister: Rev. Lisa Dolson 519-955-2158 revlisa dot knoxbayfield@icloud dot com

Resources include: PCC Worship Planner, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/> Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, and Feasting on the Word Companion, NRSV Bible

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courageous volunteers. The videos can be watched and re-watched. Personally, I stay connected with my grandkids by making videos where I read to them ... even when we are far apart. Are you aware that the Knox book study continued through the shutdowns and other restrictions. We have delighted in and wrestled with 6 very different books. The Session meetings and our Annual Congregational meeting transitioned to online virtual meetings with Zoom. Webinars and online educational opportunities have enriched the knowledge within our church during the pandemic. Sermons continue to be sent out by email and printed copies are delivered to those who cannot be here in person. Did you know the worship videos are viewed by many people each week? Faithful congregants, including the oldest person in our church, tune into YouTube to watch the Knox Bayfield service. Although this is not the same as being in close physical contact, it is a good alternative.

I wonder whether this scripture passage might encourage you to reach out. Or, do you face the stumbling block of not having anything new to share? Remember ... Mary did not know ahead of time what her visit would bring when she travelled to see Elizabeth. We hear her story and recognize how her visit has been shared through the centuries. In their willingness to embrace their faith the world changed and hope grew within their connection. May the Spirit guide us to share our hope with others in this holy time of Christmas. Praise be to God.

**Hymn      Immortal, invisible, God only wise      #290**

**THE OFFERING OF OUR LIFE AND LABOUR TO THE LORD**      *Hebrew 10:5-10*

**QUOTE** We offer our gifts and talents as a response to what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ. David N. Mosser, author of *The Stewardship Companion*

God does not require burnt offerings and sin offerings. We bring to God offerings of our time, talent, and financial resources with the prayer that God's will may be done through them.

**Special Music      A Christmas Meditation** Roy E. Nolte  
**Piano/Organ Duet      Ruth George/Jean Walker**

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**BLESSING OF GIFTS & PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Let us join in prayer:

You deliver us, O God, from exile, separation, and despair into communion with each other, with you, and with your good news. We thank you for all that draws us close together, astounding us with lives transformed by gratitude. Accept our gifts as signs of our gratitude for what you give us every day.

Holy God, you reveal yourself in many ways. We gather up the prayers of this community for the church, the world, and all in need, confident that you know our deepest thoughts and will refresh our spirits.

We pray for our siblings in Christ who gather as we do on this day all over the world. They gather in house churches and storefronts, on reserves, among immigrants, in hospital chapels, hospice, and prisons. We pray the people of the church will be empowered to strengthen and stretch the vision of your people.

We pray for the healing of the waters, the air, and the soil and for all creatures that roam in your creation, O holy One. Show us their beauty and our need for each of them.

We pray for an end to violence, oppression, and injustice. We pray for all who sing Mary's song of joy for deliverance; for all people who long to hear your promise of good news; for all peacemakers; for all who work to care for people in need. In your great mercy, lead your people from darkness to light.

We pray for all people who face the complexity of nurturing children. The parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends. We pray for children who yearn for a loving caregiver. We lift up those who are born into hunger and insecurity. May your Holy Spirit linger with them to make them aware of your deep love. May your Spirit guide all who are able to help those in need.

We pray that Mary's song of joy and Joseph's loyalty will be magnified in us. Fill us with the breath of Advent. Stir us to extend ourselves beyond what we thought possible. God of love, we lift up those who travel the long journey of grief and mourning. We pray for Sandy and family, and David and Sharon. Holy God, we bring before you the names of people on our hearts this day: Rudy and Grace; Bonnie; Rob; Courtney and Kyla. We lift up all those who prefer to remain un-named as they face immense challenges of health

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and finances. Merciful God, accept our prayers, spoken and unspoken. May your love overflow more and more in our lives, in your church, and in all the world.

We join our voices together across space and time to speak the words that Christ taught his disciples ... **Our Father who art in heaven, hallow'ed 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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

**Hymn            O little town of Bethlehem            #164**

**To Go Forth In God's Name  
Commissioning and Benediction**

God has shown you what is good. What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. May the God of justice be your path, the Lord of mercy be your guide, and the Spirit of love be your light, this day and forevermore.  
Amen

**Postlude    Let there be peace on earth**

**Hope is a star                            #119**

1. Hope is a star that shines in the night, leading us on till the morning is bright.

**Refrain**        When God is a child there's joy in our song. The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong, and none shall be afraid.

2. Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth, giving a promise of safety and worth. **Refrain**

3. Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn, telling the world that the Saviour is born.

**Refrain**

4. Love is a flame that burns in our heart. Jesus has come and will never depart. **Refrain**

**Let there be peace on earth\***

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me; let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be. With God our creator we are family, let us walk with each other in perfect harmony\*. Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now; with every step I take, let this be my solemn vow: to take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

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**We cannot own the sunlit sky #717**

We cannot own the sunlit sky, The moon, the wildflowers growing, For we are part of all that is Within life's river flowing. With open hands receive and share The gifts of God's creation, That all may have abundant life In every earthly nation.

When bodies shiver in the night, And, weary, wait for morning, When children have no bread but tears, And war horns sound their warning, God calls humanity to wake, To join in common labour, That all may have abundant life In oneness with their neighbour.

God calls humanity to join As partners in creating A future free from want of fear, Life's goodness celebrating. That new world beckons from afar, Invites our shared endeavour, That all may have abundant life And peace endure forever.

**Immortal, invisible, God only wise #290**

Immortal, invisible, God only wise, In light inaccessible hid from our eyes, Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting and silent as light, Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might; Thy justice like mountains high soaring above Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small; In all life thou livest, the true life of all; We blossom and flourish like leaves on the tree, And wither, and perish, but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light, Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight; All laud we would render: oh help us to see 'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

**O little town of Bethlehem #164**

O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by: Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting light; The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, And gathered all above, While mortals sleep, the angels keep

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Their watch of wondering love. O morning stars, together Proclaim the holy birth, And praises sing to God the King, And peace to all on earth.

How silently, how silently, The wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts The blessings born of heaven. No ear may hear his coming, But in this world of sin, Where meek souls will receive him, still The dear Christ enters in.

O holy child of Bethlehem, Descend to us we pray; Cast out our sin and enter in; Be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels The great glad tidings tell; Oh come to us, abide with us, Our Lord, Emmanuel.