

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BAYFIELD

2022 12 18

May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you ... **and also with you.** Welcome to worship at Knox Presbyterian Bayfield on the fourth Sunday of Advent December 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Announcements**

**Mission Moment** Through gifts to Presbyterians Sharing, Cyclical PCC supports many important outreach ministries in Canada. One such ministry is the Presbytery of Montreal's Communauté Rivière des Prairies, a new worshipping community where they embrace multilingualism in their church services and children's programming. Over five different languages and dialects are used to connect with newcomers in the church family and in the wider community.

We will have special music in the longest night service with the Solace Bedside Singers and on Christmas Eve with the very talented Linda Street.

The collection of new socks continues to grow under the tree. The foodbank items have been distributed so we will begin again. The focus for the coming weeks will be

The people of Knox Bayfield acknowledge with gratitude the territory upon which we live, work, play and worship. Knox is on the traditional lands of the Anishinabewaki, Attiwonderonk (Neutral), and Mississauga peoples within Treaty 29, of 1827. We are all treaty people. We acknowledge that The Presbyterian Church in Canada was a part of the residential school system. There is much for us to learn as we seek a new relationship with the First Nations of this land, one based in truth, respect, and reconciliation.

**Hymn                      Let There be Light (v 1, 2, 3)                      #727**

**Call To Worship**

**PWS&D "Love" Insert (responsive)**

**Hymn                      Hope is a star (v 4)                      #119**

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

Emmanuel, God with us, we praise you for your presence throughout the amazing universe you have made. The shining stars sing your praise and echo into the expanse of space. Inspire us with your loving Spirit as we move toward Christmas Day, so that our celebrations will share your love with those who most in need. Lord of love, we confess we sometimes find your love daunting. You called Joseph to honour his love for Mary, even when custom called him to break his engagement. We confess custom has a hold on us. You call us to love our neighbour, but we resist your call if our neighbours annoy us. You call us to love our enemies, but that seems impossible in these contentious times. Help us to love as Jesus loved so he will be born again in us. Amen.

**Assurance of Pardon**

Receive the Good News with love. God forgives what we confess, offering us new life in Christ. Know that God's steadfast love is yours. Share that love with friend and enemy alike so that the power of love can change the world.

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**

God of life and love, we turn to your Word to hear your will and your wisdom for our times. Open our hearts and minds by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit so that we might hear what you are saying to the church through Christ, your Love Incarnate.

**SCRIPTURE**

Tanakh*	Isaiah 7:10-16	[B#636/W#705]
Tanakh	Psalms 84:1-4	[B#543/W#600]
Epistle	Romans 1:1-7	[B#152/W#158]
Gospel	Matthew 1:18-25	[B#1/W#1]

May God bless our understanding of this, God's holy word. **The word of the Lord.**

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

## **One Dimensional?**

O holy One, by the power of your Holy Spirit at work in the word read and proclaimed, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

The scriptures provide complex stories of God interacting with creation. In the stories we discover the ways in which people live and how their choices are made. The stories are steeped in rich historical information that provides a context for the reader to better understand the unfolding events.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent we enter into the stories of Ahaz and Joseph. In simple terms, both men are faced with significant challenges. The prophet Isaiah lived in and around Jerusalem during the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, when the Assyrians were conquering the northern part of the country. Isaiah spoke out against Israel's injustice and misguided trust in ritual. He called the people to repent. He compared the sins of Judah to fine vineyard producing only wild grapes. Isaiah told King Ahaz not to fear pressure from Israel and Syria. The passage from Isaiah continues his story of the fear held by King Ahaz. He feared the possible attack on Jerusalem. It is within this context that God offered Ahaz a sign that he could trust in God. Ahaz refused saying that he did not want to test God. Isaiah told the king, "Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign". God spoke through Isaiah of a young woman who would bear a son and name him Immanuel.

The gospel passage today speaks of God as Spirit. Mary "was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit", and Joseph was told that "the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit". God's work upsets our expectations and our cultural structures. In the gospel passage, Joseph struggled with the reality of Mary's pregnancy. She is pregnant and it is not his child.

Joseph, a righteous man, discovered that his soon-to-be-wife was pregnant. Perhaps for Joseph the pregnancy not only violated social expectations and ethics. Perhaps he was heart broken with the thought that Mary was unfaithful. Perhaps out of kindness, or maybe regret, he decided to end the relationship quietly. He would not shame her but he would distance himself from her. The simple fact was ... Mary violated their relationship and she was pregnant with a child that could not be Joseph's.

Can you remember a time when the heartfelt, spiritually driven action conflicted with cultural expectations? Joseph went against cultural expectations in staying with Mary when God intervened in an unexpected way ... with an angel in a dream.

In his commentary, Aaron Klink summarized the angel's message, "I know this is not what you expected, Joseph, but it is going to be OK. God is about to do something wonderful, despite the fact that according to Jewish custom and law you are in a rather socially unacceptable situation."<sup>2</sup> Somehow Joseph was able to trust this strange news that was delivered in a dream. Somehow Joseph found himself trusting that this child was from the Holy Spirit; that he was named Jesus; and that he would be a saviour to the people.

Unexpected choices can often be wonderful signs that God is at work. It is often within the unexpected, within the chaos and the turmoil, that we find God.

It can be challenging to consider the diverse aspects of complex stories. It may seem easier to see the good vs the bad in simple terms. The consequences of one-dimensional views lead to oppressive policies and 'cancel culture'. Cancel culture is a form of extreme boycott which results in the "canceling" of a person or product. It is "the popular practice of withdrawing support for...public figures and companies after they have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive."<sup>3</sup> It is the current expression of shunning and ostracism. Cancel culture does not provide an opportunity to learn from and correct issues, rather the person is simply labeled as bad.

Jan Milič Lochman (1922-2004), a Czech theologian noted the similar ways in which both the communist East and the capitalist West encourage "one-dimensional" views of reality. He explored the ways in which the complexities of truth become reduced to facts; and, the ways in which the simplified facts are used to support an argument or policy. Society is shaped by the ways in which reality is perceived and one-dimensional systems support narrow views, oppression, tyranny, and prejudice. Lochman held that, at its best, Christian faith stepped away from this impoverished one-dimensional perspective by

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<sup>2</sup> Aaron Klink, Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Year A, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-mental-health-effects-of-cancel-culture-5119201>

seeing the complexity of God's creation as it is embraced by with the grace and love of God.

Ahaz reacted to the threat of invasion with fear and in his fear he turned away from God. Are we able to trust in God's living presence in murky and frightening situations. When we step back a little we discover these stories are repeated throughout history. This passage from Isaiah speaks of people who living in fear and uncertainty as they become increasingly unsure of God's presence. There is no doubt that it is difficult to live with fear and continue to function. Fear can be useful when we take action to protect from harm and it can be crippling when fear controls us. Have you experienced fear in your life? For some, fear may be momentary. Perhaps you've had a snake slither across your hand in the garden. For others, experiences of fear may include dealing with a significant health issue; an abusive relationship; or the impact of economic uncertainty. For some, fear rises up as the cupboard empties and a paycheque is a future possibility.

Fear may limit the capacity to think through the problem. Fear takes us out of the present moment and forecasts future catastrophic events. When fear takes over it is difficult to think clearly in the present moment. I clearly recall the fear I experienced when issues with my spine caused intense pain and limited movement. The fear exacerbated the pain. My imagination could not bear the thought of ongoing, increased pain. I remember the moment, in the midst of the pain and the fear, and the sense of stillness that came over me. In that moment I knew that I was not alone with my distress. In the depth of despair, whether it was physical or emotional, I would not be alone. God promises to be in the darkness of uncertainty with me. And that sure sense of God's presence allowed me to remain present and let go of the fear.

There are many ways that we can be aware of God's presence. When we are attentive it is possible to see God at work through acts of compassion, mercy, and love in challenging situations. God provides divine signs and fulfills the promise of faithfulness and grace, and ...sometimes, in a way similar to that of King Ahaz, God does this despite our objections. Consider God's gracious offer to Ahaz and the king's refusal. Isaiah made it clear, the king was missing the point of God's offer. When Ahaz refused the sign, he refused to trust in the living God who was speaking to him. Is it possible that we repeat this same pattern? Is it possible that we fail to respond to God's unconventional ways and unexpected grace?

In a dream, Joseph discovered that he was encouraged to follow a different path, a path that set aside the expectations within his culture. In doing so, Joseph demonstrated profound trust when he followed the prophetic direction from an angel in a dream.

How has God intervened in your life? Perhaps it was through someone reaching out to you—through love or intervention. How many times has the Holy Spirit, wisdom, or love shaped your actions in contrast to cultural expectations? Perhaps you were caught off guard like Joseph. We are encouraged by the stories in scripture to be attentive when God opens a door, offers a vision or a dream.

Over the years I can recall specific moments in time when I felt the Spirit guiding me in tangible ways. Times when I was able to lean into my faith when significant decisions were at hand. At times of loss, times of change, and times of confusion. It was challenging to wait, to discern whether it was time to continue the journey or to pause. In the moment it was both difficult and necessary to be still in the muckiness. Yet, in the midst of turmoil there was a sense that God was at work in my life. I have learned to trust that God's path would become visible. I have learned to trust that my fear would diminish. The poet David Whyte wrote that for most of us "the call will not come so grandly, so biblically, but intimately, in the face of the one you know you have to love." God reaches us to guide us in many ways. At times in dreams and at times in the presence of others who affirm the path we are pursuing. In the small steps and the significant decisions, God calls to us. Joseph and Mary were guided by the Holy Spirit toward the reality of Immanuel among us. They did not know where God would lead or the challenges they would encounter along the way. Yet, they sensed the presence of God's Spirit calling to them. Praise be to God for visions and the movement of the Spirit among us.

**Hymn**

**People in darkness**

**#124**

**THE OFFERING OF OUR LIFE AND LABOUR TO THE LORD**

**QUOTE** Time cannot be packaged and ribboned and left under trees for Christmas morning. Time can't be given. But it can be shared. Cecelia Ahern, author

This Sunday we celebrate the Advent of Love, embracing us in Jesus Christ. Think of your gifts as seeds of that love which we can plant in the world God loves for Christ's sake.

**Prayers of the People, Blessing of Gifts**

O holy God, we are grateful for the wonder you bring into a world so full of complaint and criticism. Draw near to us that in this season of celebration we may know your presence and sing with all your people.

Our world is struggling for the justice and mercy you bring. Draw near to all who are working for peace and justice. Give hope to people under oppression and those who live with fear or hunger day by day.

God, our Love and our Life, receive our gifts as seeds of gratitude for your gift to us in Christ Jesus. Bless these seeds with growth so that love will embrace people who feel lost and alone in this season, and places fearing they will be overlooked among so much need. Be their love and their life.

Come, faithful God, be our guide through the darkening days and the chill of winter. Show us the way to wisdom and gratitude. We are thankful for the kindness we know in friends and good neighbours, in warm houses and warm smiles. Encourage us to reach out to those who need your embrace and ours, so that we may sing your praise together.

Loving God, be our hope in the uncertain times in which we find ourselves. Touch us with your healing and grace. We remember before you those who are living with loss or illness, those who face depression or discouragement, and any who struggle with hope. Shine the light of your courage and comfort into their lives.

Loving God, by your Spirit, surround us with strength and love. Equip us to offer support for those who are near to us. God of hope, we ask you to linger with Lyle, Deb and family; Stephani, Judith & Gerry; Rob; Stephanie and family; and, Grace & Rudy. We lift up all those who are on our hearts as they face immense challenges. Before we call, you answer, God. Before we speak, you know our voices. Hear our prayers. Let there be joy in Jerusalem and peace among all nations. Let sounds of weeping and cries of distress turn to shouts of joy and laughter. Let infants grow and thrive; let the old dance like children. Let every person find a home and enjoy the fruit of their labor.

With voices united in love and loyalty, we offer the prayer taught by Christ

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 Oh come, oh come Emmanuel (v 1, 2) #122**

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

Go in love this day to greet friend and enemy, neighbour and stranger with the warmth and wonder of Jesus the Christ in your smile. May the all-forgiving grace of Christ, the all-inspiring love of God, and the all-embracing communion of the Holy Spirit be yours this day and in each day to come, now and evermore. Amen.

**Postlude**

**Amen**

**64 Be still and know**

Be still and that I am God x3

I am the Lord that health thee x3

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust x 3

**#727 Let there be light**

Let there be light; let there be understanding; Let all the nations gather; let them be face to face. Open our lips; open our minds to ponder; Open the door of concord, opening into grace.

Perish the sword; perish the angry judgement; Perish the bombs and hunger; perish the fight for gain. Hallow our love; hallow the deaths of martyrs; Hallow their holy freedom; hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come; your spirit turn to language; Your people speak together; your spirit never fade. Let there be light; open our hearts to wonder; Perish the way of terror; hallow the world God made.

**124 People in darkness**

1. People in darkness are looking for light. Come, come, come, Jesus Christ. People with blindness are longing for sight. Come, Lord Jesus Christ. These days of adventure when all people wait are days for the advent of love.
2. People with sickness are praying for health. Come, come, come, Jesus Christ. People in poverty want to have wealth. Come, Lord Jesus Christ. These days of adventure when all people wait are days for the advent of hope.
3. People in trouble would like to be free. Come, come, come, Jesus Christ. People with arguments want to agree. Come, Lord Jesus Christ. These days of adventure when all people wait are days for the advent of peace.



4. People in sadness are trying to sing. Come, come, come, Jesus Christ. Bells in the steeple are waiting to ring. Come, Lord Jesus Christ. These days of adventure when all people wait are days for the advent of joy.

**119 Hope is a star v1**

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**

**122 Oh come, oh come Emmanuel**

1. Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lowly exile here, until the Son of God appear.

**Refrain** Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

2. Oh come, oh come, thou Lord of might, who to thy tribes on Sinai's height, in ancient times didst give the law in cloud and majesty and awe. **Refrain**
3. Oh come, thou Wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh; to us the path of knowledge show, and cause us in her ways to go. **Refrain**
4. Oh come, thou Branch of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny; from the depths of hell thy people save, and give them victory o'er the grave. **Refrain**
5. Oh come, thou Key of David, come and open wide our heavenly home; make safe the way that leads on high and close the path to misery. **Refrain**
6. Oh come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here; disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight. **Refrain**
7. Oh come, desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart, one mind; bid envy, strife and discord cease, and be thyself our source of peace. **Refrain**