**MODIFIED SERVICE- The 2nd Sunday of Advent, December 6, 2020**

**ZION EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH, PHLIPSBURG**

**Lighting of the advent wreath: peace-** Rev. Karen Ware Jackson\*

Light one candle for peace. Because the world is broken and the wait is long,

but we refuse to be frozen by fear. Peace comes in fits and starts a deep breath a courageous truth a humble heart. “Prepare the way,” she whispers, “for the Lord comes to make the broken whole.”

So, we light one candle, because it only takes one: Christ with us.

Welcome to everyone on this the 2nd Sunday of Advent, where we continue to gather safely from the comfort of our homes as a reminder of our love for one another. Snow has returned!

Thanks to our confirmands Payton, Grace, and Dean for doing a wonderful job of reading the Advent litany this morning!

I ask that you keep the family of Elizabeth Jutzi in your prayers. Elizabeth died suddenly on Thursday evening. She is the daughter of Stew and Cindy Jutzi and Lila Ramseyer’s granddaughter as well as a great niece to Dave Doering. We will remember the family in our prayers this morning.

Today is also the 31st anniversary of the massacre at École Polytechnique de Montréal where fourteen women were killed. We will remember the lives of these young women in our prayers as well.

Our GotoMeeting Coffee hour meets at 11:00, please join us!

As we enter the last month of 2020, please remember that Zion relies on your continued support each week to meet our monthly expenses. Thank you to all who support and pray for our congregation.

Throughout this service and the season of Advent we will be using worship resources prepared by the Resumption of In-Person Task Force. We give thanks to the Rev. Karen Ware Jackson for the Advent litany.

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

Blessed be God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, whose forgiveness is sure

and whose steadfast love endures forever. **Amen**.

Let us honestly and humbly confess that we have not lived as God desires. *Silence*

Loving and forgiving God, we confess that we are held captive by sin.

In spite of our best efforts, we have gone astray. We have not welcomed the stranger;

we have not loved our neighbor; we have not been Christ to one another.

Restore us, O God.

Wake us up and turn us from our sin. Renew us each day in the light of Christ. Amen.

People of God, hear this glad news: by God’s endless grace

your sins are forgiven, and you are free— free from all that holds you back and free to live in the peaceable realm of God.

May you be strengthened in God’s love,☩ comforted by Christ’s peace, and accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**GREETING**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming strengthen us to serve you with purified lives; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**GATHERING SONG*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (ELW 257)**

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.  
  
Refrain  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.  
  
2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,  
embracing all things far and nigh:  
in strength and beauty come and stay;  
teach us your will and guide our way. Refrain  
  
3 O come, O come, O Lord of might,  
as to your tribes on Sinai's height  
in ancient times you gave the law  
in cloud, and majesty, and awe. Refrain  
  
4 O come, O Branch of Jesse, free  
your own from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell your people save,  
and give them vict'ry o'er the grave. Refrain

**WORD**

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

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 40:1-11**

A reading from Isaiah.

1Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.  
 2Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.  
3A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”  
6A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry? ”All people are grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field. 7The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. 8The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. 9Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah,  
“Here is your God!” 10See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.  
11He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

**SECOND READING: 2nd Peter 3:8-15a**

A reading from 2nd Peter.

8Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. 9The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. 10But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.  
  11Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, 12waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? 13But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.  
 14Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; 15aand regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

**GOSPEL: Mark 1:1-8**

The holy gospel according to Mark.

1The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight,’ ”  
4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**SERMON**

Our gospel reading this morning was from the 1st chapter of Mark. Mark is believed to be the first gospel that was written and what I find interesting is that there is no mention of Jesus’ birth narrative. We do not hear the good news in the timeless story of his birth. We do not hear about the angels who announce his birth or the shepherds who travel to see him. Matthew and Luke both tell the good news of the birth story, and the gospel of John begins with the beginning of time. Mark, however, begins with a simple phrase, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God” (Mark 1:1). The good news in Mark harkens back to the prophets of the Old Testament; back to the proclamation in both Malachi and Isaiah that a messenger would be sent to prepare the way for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Our gospel reading today introduces us to that messenger who was named John the Baptist, son of Elizabeth and a priest named Zechariah. We read in the gospel of Luke that Elizabeth and Zechariah were faithful followers of God, “living blamelessly and according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord” (Luke 1:6). They were ageing and had been childless for many years and had all but given up on becoming parents. One day Zechariah was visited by an angel who told him that he and Elizabeth would become parents to a son who would be named John. They were shocked because of their age but overjoyed that God would bless them with a son. Many would rejoice at the birth of this tiny babe who was filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth. The angel proclaimed that John through that power and spirit of the prophet Elijah would turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

And this is where the gospel of Mark begins. For over 400 years, the voices of the prophets had been silenced, until the presence of John the Baptist, an itinerant preacher and baptizer. God sent John as a messenger to proclaim the good news, to proclaim unconditional love for all humankind through the repentance and forgiveness of our sin, to prepare the way for the One who was coming.

John was a man who seemed larger than life. Drawings depict him as a man of great stature and promise with wild hair and a great bushy beard. He dressed simply in clothing made of camel’s hair like that of the prophet Elijah. He ate plain meals of locusts and honey and lived in the wilderness, forsaking community. John was a man of self-sacrifice, self-denial, and humility. For over 400 years the prophets had been silenced, but John the Baptist’s arrival changed everything. Folks heard the good news, and they left the cities and towns where they lived to gather in the wilderness to be baptized by him, to prepare for the one who was to come. They were looking for hope. They were looking for peace within the brokenness of their lives. They were looking for a promise for the future. They were looking for direction. They were looking for God to remedy all that was wrong with their world. The first centuries folks may not have been in Exile like the people of Judah in our reading from Isaiah, but they were under Roman occupation. They knew what it was like to live in oppression and hate, within the greed and power of the empire. They were looking for good news and John was the messenger of that good news from God!

Now, John did have power, but he used his power for good so to speak. He could have proclaimed that he was the Promised One; he did have the power of the Holy Spirit in him. But that was not who John was called to be. John was a true and devoted servant of God, who demonstrated humbleness and humility, authenticity, and great trust. The humbleness of John is his knowledge that he was a transitional character. He understood that the beginning of the good news was not with him or the prophets, the beginning of the good news was and is Jesus Christ himself.

John offered comfort to the people who were worn down and looking for profound hope in a broken world. John was like the voice in our reading from Isaiah who offered comfort and hope to the exiles of Judah. He proclaimed that folks needed to prepare for the one who was coming, to wait and to repent and confess their sins. So, it is fitting that we read this on this second Sunday of Advent, for Advent is a time of waiting, a time of hope and proclamation for things that are to come.

I think our world today can use a little comfort as well. Perhaps we are in our own wilderness just like the crowds who gathered to see John the Baptist. We are all tired. We are tired of Covid; we are tired of not being able to see our family and friends. We are tired of cooking and miss going to our favourite restaurants. We miss church, and we just miss each other. We too are looking for direction and hope within the darkness. We are looking for a messenger who tells us to prepare for the one who is to come.

Comfort comes in our reading from 2 Peter this morning. God knew what the people of Judah went through, God knew what the first-century Jewish folks went through under Roman occupation and God knows what we are going through in our lives today. Throughout time and history, we are not alone. God knows our pain. God knows our sorrow and struggles. God comforts us throughout our daily lives and into our eternal life, through the grace and mercy of his beloved and only Son, Jesus Christ. May this comfort be a balm to our weary souls and may it bring peace and hope to our hearts and minds. Let us be messengers of God, let us continue to live in the good news, and prepare for the one that is to come. Oh, what a day it will be! Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY*All Earth Is Hopeful* (ELW 266)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6y1bxBhlT2k&t=31s>

**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. *A brief silence.*

Faithful God, you teach us to wait for you with faithfulness and patience. Sustain and support us in our doubts and questions. Nurture our faith as we discern and enact your mission. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Loving God, you set the stars in the sky and breathe life into the earth. Renew the face of creation where it is in need of your healing touch. Mend the wounds of environmental damage and restore balance to ecosystems so that all creation can declare your praise. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Steadfast God, you never tire of seeking justice and peace in our broken world. Where people suffer from discrimination, judgment, and injustice, speak words of truth and comfort. Lead us toward a world where faithfulness will sprout underfoot and righteousness rain down from above. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Leading God, you ask us to make uneven ground smooth. Make even the disparities between your people. Sustain and support people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Accompany disability advocates who work for a world accessible to all. Teach us to celebrate the great diversity in our midst. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Loving God, you walk with us in our sorrow and grief. We remember the 14 young women who were senselessly murdered at Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal on this day in 1989. Enliven us to end gender-based violence that targets women. Hear us O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Tender God, you know sorrow and joy alike. We pray for those in our families and congregation who are not joyful in this holiday season. Comfort those who grieve, be a companion to all who are lonely, tend those who are sick, those who are injured, or struggling with depression, and gather all people in your healing embrace. We especially remember Eddie, Elaine, Susie, Ruth, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Alea, Stephanie, Joe, Greg, the family of Elizabeth Jutzi and those we name in the stillness of our hearts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, we give thanks for the saints who have prepared your way in the wilderness and taught us to continue their faithful work. Make their generous lives an example for all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

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

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

Let us pray.

Holy God,the Beginning and the Ending, our Hope as we wait, we praise you for joining us to your people of old. We bless you for your prophets who call us to righteousness and promise a new earth with peace for all. For the Word of your covenant, we thank you, O God.

We praise you for the coming of Jesus our Lord, who lifts up the lowly, heals the suffering world, and proclaims your way of mercy and truth.

For your Word who is Christ, we magnify you, O God.

Send your Spirit on all who receive your Word. Nurture our faith with your grace, accompany us with your might, and empower our zeal for your justice and joy.

For your Word through the church, we praise you, O God.

All praise to you, holy God, today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING**

The Creator of the stars bless your Advent waiting, the long-expected Saviour fill you with love, the unexpected Spirit guide your journey, + now and forever. Amen.

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**SENDING SONG*Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*(ELW 254)**

1 Come, thou long-expected Jesus,  
born to set thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us;  
let us find our rest in thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation,  
hope of all the earth thou art,  
dear desire of ev'ry nation,  
joy of ev'ry longing heart.  
  
2 Born thy people to deliver,  
born a child, and yet a king;  
born to reign in us forever,  
now thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By thine own eternal Spirit  
rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all-sufficient merit  
raise us to thy glorious throne.

\*Karen Ware Jackson, 2020. Permission is granted for home and congregational use

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