

# Morning Prayer

December 24, 2023

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85887946777?pwd=ei94>

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Meeting ID: 858 8794 6777

Passcode: 782611

## The Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year B

On this last Sunday of Advent, our waiting and watching is nearly complete. The appearance of our Lord Jesus is immanent. The Light of the world will shine on us. And we let our lights shine, having prepared ourselves to greet that day of joy and delight.

**O come, o come Emmanuel.**



*All stand as they are able*

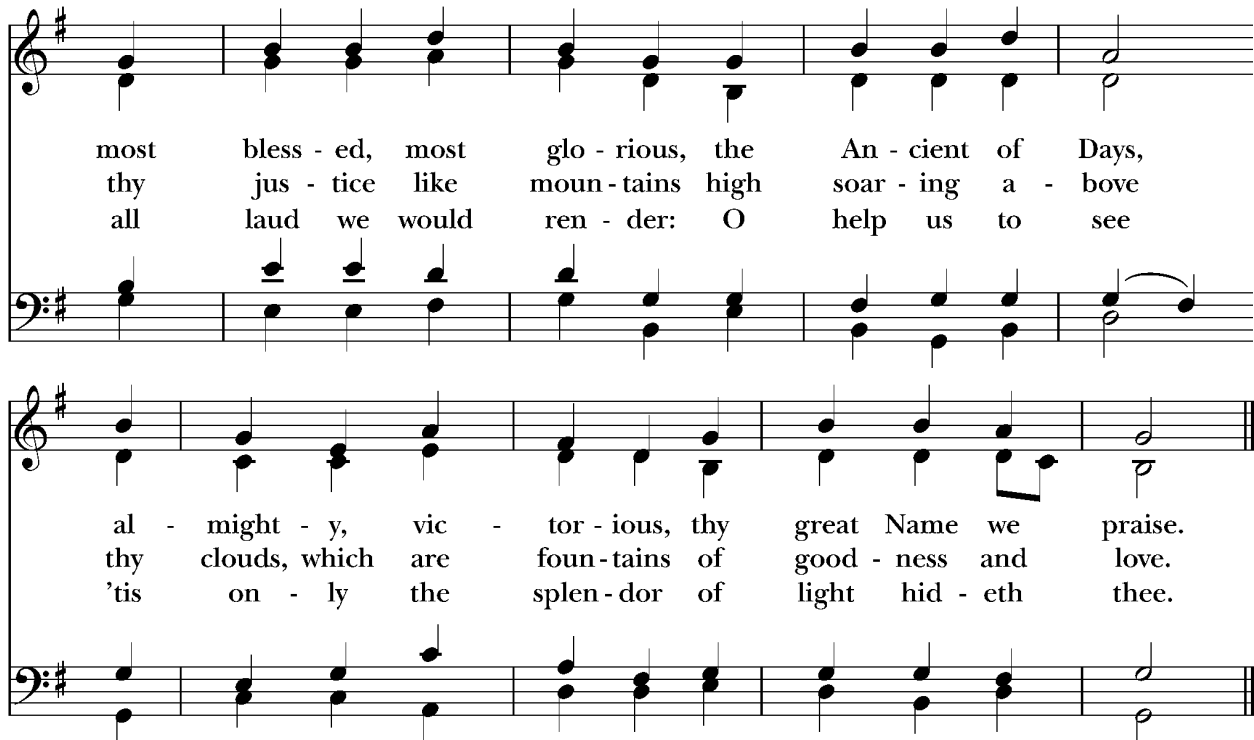
### Opening Hymn

*Immortal, invisible, God only wise*

**Hymnal 423**

1 Im - mor - tal, in - vis - i - ble, God on - ly wise,  
2 Un - rest - ing, un - hast - ing, and si - lent as light,  
4 Thou reign - est in glo - ry, thou rul - est in light,

in light in - ac - ces - si - ble hid from our eyes,  
nor want - ing, nor wast - ing, thou rul - est in might;  
thine an - gels a - dore thee, all veil - ing their sight;



most bless - ed, most glo - rious, the An - cient of Days,  
 thy jus - tice like moun - tains high soar - ing a - bove  
 all laud we would ren - der: O help us to see

al - might - y, vic - tor - ious, thy great Name we praise.  
 thy clouds, which are foun - tains of good - ness and love.  
 'tis on - ly the splen - dor of light hid - eth thee.

*Presider* Watch, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.  
*Mark 13:35, 36*

## Confession of Sin

*The Presider says*

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our heavenly Father, to set forth God's praise, to hear God's holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship, let us keep silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by God's infinite goodness and mercy.

*All kneel, or remain standing, as they are able.*

*Silence is kept.*

*The Presider and the People*

**God of all mercy,  
 we confess that we have sinned against you,  
 opposing your will in our lives.  
 We have denied your goodness in each other,  
 in ourselves, and in the world you have created.**

**We repent of the evil that enslaves us,  
the evil we have done,  
and the evil done on our behalf.  
Forgive, restore, and strengthen us  
through our Savior Jesus Christ,  
that we may abide in your love  
and serve only your will. Amen.**

*The Presider says*

Almighty God have mercy **†** on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. **Amen.**

*All stand as they are able*

### **The Invitatory and Psalter**

*Presider* O God, let our mouth proclaim your praise;  
*People* **And your glory all the day long.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia.**

*Presider* Our God and Savior now draws near:  
*People* **Come, let us worship.**

### **Jubilate: Psalm**

**Hymnal 377**

*All people that on earth do dwell*

1 All peo - ple that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with  
2 Know that the Lord is God in - deed; with - out our aid he  
3 O en - ter then his gates with praise, ap - proach with joy his  
4 For why? the Lord our God is good, his mer - cy is for  
\*5 To Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly Ghost, the God whom heaven and

1 cheer - ful voice: him serve with mirth, his praise forth  
 2 did us make: we are his folk, he doth us  
 3 courts un - to; praise, laud, and bless his Name al -  
 4 ev - er sure; his truth at all times firm - ly  
 5 earth a - dore, from men and from the an - gel

1 tell, come ye be - fore him and re - - joice.  
 2 feed, and for his sheep he doth us take.  
 3 ways, for it is seem - ly so to do.  
 4 stood, and shall from age to age en - - dure.  
 5 host be praise and glo - ry ev - er - - more.

**Psalm 89:1-4,19-26**

*to be prayed responsively*

<sup>1</sup>I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;  
 with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

<sup>2</sup>I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;  
 your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

<sup>3</sup>**You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,  
 I have sworn to my servant David:**

<sup>4</sup>**"I will establish your descendants forever,  
 and build your throne for all generations."**

<sup>19</sup>Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said:

"I have set the crown on one who is mighty,  
 I have exalted one chosen from the people.

<sup>20</sup>I have found my servant David;  
 with my holy oil I have anointed him;

<sup>21</sup>**my hand shall always remain with him;  
 my arm also shall strengthen him.**

<sup>22</sup>**The enemy shall not outwit him,  
 the wicked shall not humble him.**

<sup>23</sup>I will crush his foes before him  
 and strike down those who hate him.

<sup>24</sup>My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him;  
 and in my name his horn shall be exalted.

**<sup>25</sup>I will set his hand on the sea  
and his right hand on the rivers.  
<sup>26</sup>He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,  
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: \*  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.**

*Presider* Our God and Savior now draws near:  
*People* **Come, let us worship.**

*The people are then seated.*

## **The Lessons**

### **First Reading**

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

A Reading from the Second book of Samuel.

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

<sup>4</sup>But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: <sup>5</sup>Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? <sup>6</sup>I 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. <sup>7</sup>Wherever 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?” <sup>8</sup>Now 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; <sup>9</sup>and I have been with you wherever you 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. <sup>10</sup>And 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, <sup>11</sup>from 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. <sup>16</sup>Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

*Reader* The Word of the Lord.  
*People* **Thanks be to God.**

*The people remain seated.*

# Canticle 15

# Hymnal 438

*Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord*



1 Tell out, my soul, the great-ness of the Lord!  
 2 Tell out, my soul, the great-ness of his Name!  
 3 Tell out, my soul, the great-ness of his might!



Un - num - bered bless - ings give my spi - rit voice;  
 Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;  
 Powers and do - min - ions lay their glo - ry by.



ten - der to me the prom - ise of his word;  
 his mer - cy sure, from age to age the same;  
 Proud hearts and stub - born wills are put to flight,



in God my Sa - vior shall my heart re - jice.  
 his ho - ly Name— the Lord, the Might - y One.  
 the hun - gry fed, the hum - ble lift - ed high.

## Second Reading

Romans 16:25-27

A Reading from Paul's letter to the Church in Rome.

<sup>25</sup>Now 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 <sup>26</sup>but 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—<sup>27</sup>to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

*Reader* The Word of the Lord.

*People* **Thanks be to God.**

*All stand as they are able.*

# Hymn

# Voices Found 64

Mary, when the angel's voice



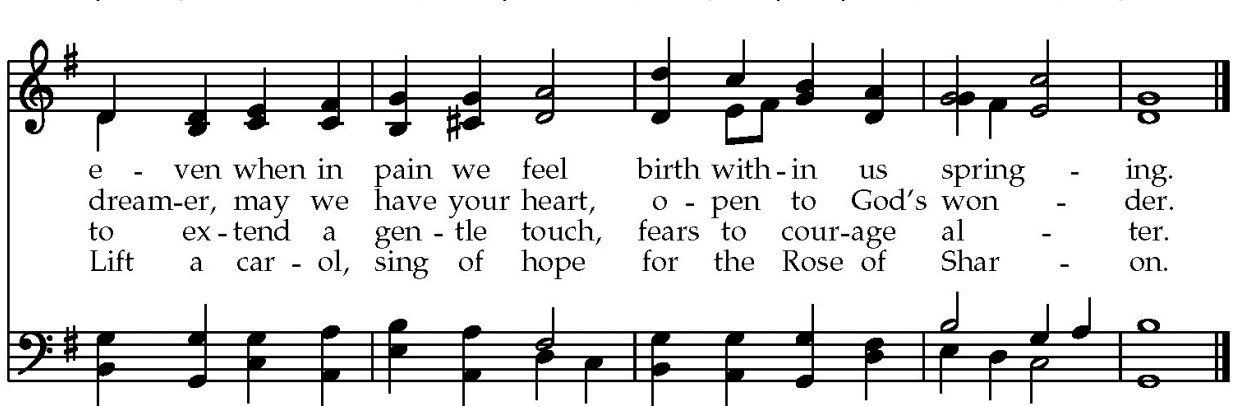
1 Ma - ry, when the an - gel's voice called you high - ly fa - vored,  
2 Jo - seph, in your dark - est night, an - gel mes - sage hear - ing,  
3 Old and sage E - liz - a - beth, birth an - ti - ci - pat - ing,  
4 God whose name we mag - ni - fy, all your child - ren mat - ter.



dread and joy in your heart mixed, pon - dered there and sa - vored.  
you cast not your love a - side, scorn and an - ger fear - ing.  
nur - tur - ing your cous - in's will, you taught hope - ful wait - ing.  
From op - pres - sion raise the poor; proud and might - y scat - ter.



May we learn to wel - come all that our life is bring - ing,  
When a loved one brings us grief, rips our world a - sun - der,  
So, as wo - men long have done, may we nev - er fal - ter  
Seeds be - neath the win - ter snow live, 'tho all seems bar - ren.



e - ven when in pain we feel birth with - in us spring - ing.  
dream - er, may we have your heart, o - pen to God's won - der.  
to ex - tend a gen - tle touch, fears to cour - age al - ter.  
Lift a car - ol, sing of hope for the Rose of Shar - on.

*The people are then seated*

## Third Reading

Luke 1:26-38

A Reading from Luke.

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>The 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. <sup>36</sup>And 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. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>Then 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.



*Reader* The Word of the Lord.

*People* **Thanks be to God.**

## Sermon

**Rob Hampton**

*All stand as they are able.*

## The Apostles' Creed

*The Presider begins*

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
**creator of heaven and earth;**  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
**He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He 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,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again 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.**

*All kneel, or stand, as they are able.*

## **The Prayers**

*Presider* The Lord be with you.

*People* **And also with you.**

*Presider* Let us pray.

*The Presider and the People*

**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,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**

V. Show us your mercy, O Lord;

**R. And grant us your salvation.**

V. Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

**R. Let your people sing with joy.**

V. Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;

**R. For only in you can we live in safety.**

V. Lord, keep this nation under your care;

**R. And guide us in the way of justice and truth.**

V. Let your way be known upon earth;

**R. Your saving health among all nations.**

V. Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

**R. Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.**

V. Create in us clean hearts, O God;

**R. And sustain us with your Holy Spirit.**

### *The Collect of the Day*

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### *A Collect for Grace*

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### *A Collect for Guidance*

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### *A Prayer for Mission*

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. **Amen**

## **Intercessions and Thanksgivings**

*Presider* Sisters and brothers, siblings in Christ, we pray to the Holy One, giving thanks that God astounded Mary with her invitation to bear the Son. Surprise us with the joy of your delight in us, with your invitation to do your will, with the light of Christ growing within us. Surprise us, Lord, again and again.

*Intercessor* Holy One, we are your children. Increase the faith in us, day by day, season by season. Empower us to seek and do your will. Cause us to surprise ourselves by opening up our hearts to find that you are always there. **Surprise us, Lord.**

*Silence is kept.*

We pray that the leaders of all the nations demonstrate wisdom, and a heart for the good of their people, and peace between neighbors. **Surprise us, Lord.**

*Silence is kept.*

We pray that the peoples of all the nations realize freedom, and an end to hunger and poverty. Enable a spirit of generosity to flow throughout the world. **Surprise us, Lord.**

*Silence is kept.*

We pray for our neighbors with whom we work and live. Surprise us with what can be accomplished when we work together for the common good. Show us how we can serve with the abundant blessings you give us [especially \_\_\_\_\_, and any other blessings you wish to name now]. Open our eyes to see you in each person we meet. Open our hearts and hands to each need we encounter. **Surprise us, Lord.**

*Silence is kept.*

Christ Jesus, you are ruler of all things in heaven and earth. Hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all a burning heart for our congregation, and all things necessary for our common life, and the embrace of the ministries with which you have gifted everyone. Bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church. Show your servants your works, O Lord. **Surprise us, Lord.**

*Silence is kept.*

God our Savior, we rely on, and give thanks for, your divine wisdom, knowledge and understanding. We know that, because of your Holy Spirit's guidance, we can make the right decisions in line with your will and purpose for this parish. We ask for the Spirit of discernment, that we each may be enabled to make those decisions that will lead us to the serving of your church in this place. Show your servants your works, O Lord. **Surprise us, Lord.**

*Silence is kept*

We pray for healing for those with troubled spirits, who suffer from addiction, loneliness, and despair. We ask for healing for those who struggle with the consequences of illness or recovering from surgery. [We pray for \_\_\_\_\_ and any others you wish to name now.] Reveal to us how to join in your saving and healing work through the power of your Spirit. **Surprise us, Lord.**

We pray for those who have died [remembering \_\_\_\_\_, and any others you wish to name now,] who now rest in your eternal embrace. May the light of your love surround them and comfort those who grieve their deaths. Surprise them with the sure hope of the Resurrection. **Surprise us, Lord.**

*Silence is kept.*

*Presider* Holy One, we are your people. Increase the faith in us day by day. Surprise us with your loving, liberating, and life-giving presence. **Surprise us, Lord, again and again. Amen.**

## **Announcements**

*The Presider then says*

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

Let us present the offerings and oblations of our life and labor to the Lord.

*The People stand as they are able when the offerings are presented at the Altar*

## **Offertory Hymn**

## **Doxology**

**Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God above, you heav'nly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

*The people remain standing as they are able*

## **The General Thanksgiving**

**Almighty God, Father of all mercies,  
we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks  
for all your goodness and loving-kindness  
to us and to all whom you have made.  
We bless you for our creation, preservation,  
and all the blessings of this life;  
but above all for your immeasurable love  
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ;  
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.  
And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies,  
that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,  
not only with our lips, but in our lives,  
by giving up our selves to your service,  
and by walking before you  
in holiness and righteousness all our days;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,  
be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.**

## **A Prayer of St. Chrysostom**

*The Presider and the People*

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: **Fulfill**

now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.

**Closing Hymn**  
*Soon and very soon*

**LEVAS 14**

1. Soon and ver - y soon\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King,\_\_\_\_\_  
 2. No more cry - in' there\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King,\_\_\_\_\_  
 3. No more dy - in' there\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King,\_\_\_\_\_  
 4. Soon and ver - y soon\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King;\_\_\_\_\_

1. Soon and ver - y soon\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King,\_\_\_\_\_  
 2. No more cry - in' there\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King,\_\_\_\_\_  
 3. No more dy - in' there\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King,\_\_\_\_\_  
 4. Soon and ver - y soon\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King;\_\_\_\_\_

1. Soon and ver - y soon\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King,  
 2. No more cry - in' there\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King,  
 3. No more dy - in' there\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King,  
 4. Soon and ver - y soon\_\_\_\_\_ we are goin' to see the King;

— Hal - le - lu - jah, Hal - le - lu - jah,\_\_\_\_\_ we're goin' to see the King!

**Dismissal**

*The Presider says*

May Almighty God, by whose providence our Savior Christ came among us in great humility, sanctify us with the light of his blessing and set us free from all sin. **Amen.**

May he whose second Coming in power and great glory we await, make us steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love. **Amen.**

May we, who rejoice in the first Advent of our Redeemer, at his second Advent be rewarded with unending life. **Amen.**

And the Grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. **Amen**

*Presider* Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. **Amen.** *Ephesians 3:20, 21*

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**This week in prayer**

**Please remember these persons and congregations in your prayers this week:**

**Our Bishops** Bonnie, Michael, Justin, Moises (TEC); Elizabeth, Donald and Craig (ELCA)  
**and for** all priests, deacons, Ministry Teams, and those in formation

**Anglican Cycle of Prayer:**

December 24 The Church of the Province of South East Asia

**Diocese of Michigan Cycle of Prayer:**

December 24 St John’s, Detroit; St Paul the Apostle, Jimani, DR

**St Barnabas Cycle of Prayer:** Mary V, Michael V, Kathy W

**and our continuing prayers for:** Bob, Carlos, Jim M, Mardi, Robert, Selenah

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**Upcoming Commemorations**

- Dec.24 The Eve of the Nativity
- 25 The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ: Christmas Day
- 26 Stephen, Deacon and Martyr; and, Desmond Tutu, Bishop, 2021
- 27 John the Apostle
- 28 The Holy Innocents
- 29 Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury and Martyr, 1170

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**Faith in Action** provides leadership in collecting donations of food to support households in need in the Chelsea and Dexter areas. **If you bring food directly to FIA**, please let [Nancy](#) know, so she can continue to keep our records of donation. If you write a check, please make it to *Faith In Action*, with “St Barnabas” on the memo line. The next Food In-Gathering is **January 21**. Please contribute as generously as you can.

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**December 24, 2023**

During Advent and Christmas, we will be using study prompts and other activities tied to the sermon for the week. Read the sermon aloud and follow-up with spoken responses to the two questions at the end. Find our full sermon compilation for individual, small group, or congregational use, Sermons for Advent and Christmas

2023 at [www.sermonsthatwork.org](http://www.sermonsthatwork.org).

**Like Mary**

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Canticle 3 or Canticle 15 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Our Gospel lesson is wonderful and glorious and brings us to the edge of Christmas. It is the story of the Annunciation. The angel Gabriel is sent by God to the town of Nazareth, to a virgin whose name was Mary. For many of us, feathery images fill the mind’s eye. The angel Gabriel bows to greet Mary, his multicolored wings still unfurled from flight. He straightens up, and with lily in left hand raises his right, indicating the momentous announcement: “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”

In our Gospel, Gabriel explains: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 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.” This is good news! By the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary will conceive a son, and he will be named Jesus and he will be called the Son of the Most High. An angelic message, Gabriel’s announcement, the Annunciation of the birth of our Lord!

Given the peculiarities of our calendar, today we have the one-in-seven-year event of the Fourth Sunday of Advent falling on the same day as Christmas Eve. The temptation for the preacher this morning is to wrap things up with a quick amen, and an invitation to come back this evening to hear the rest of the story at our Christmas Eve services. After all, there are altar guilds waiting in the wings, eager to transform our sanctuaries from Advent austerity to Christmas splendor in just a few short hours. And they may very well be thinking: If the preacher has the nerve to insist that we wait to prepare the church for Christmas until the services for the Fourth Sunday of Advent are over, the least [he] could do is to keep the sermon short!

There is, of course, wisdom here, not only in always listening to the altar guild but also about keeping sermons short. Yet, Mary’s response to Gabriel has much to say about Christian faith that we ought to notice before rushing to the manger. In Luke 11:27, a woman in a crowd following Jesus shouts, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you.” To which, Jesus responds, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and respond” (11:28). Jesus doesn’t simply negate the woman’s statement about Mary. She isn’t altogether wrong. But he does amend what she says. The important thing about Mary isn’t simply that she gave birth to Jesus, but rather that she heard the word of God and responded in faith. Mary may rightly be seen as Theotokos, the God-bearer, because she gave birth to Jesus. But it is her response to the word of God that makes Mary the model of Christian discipleship.

The first thing to notice is that after Gabriel delivers his message, Mary says, “How can this be?” Now, on the one hand, this is a very understandable question. We have been told Mary was not married, that she was a virgin. How, then, is she going to have a baby? Good question. But, on the other hand, think for a moment about the Annunciation. The angel Gabriel, in all his feathery glory, appears to Mary and announces that she will conceive and bear a son. Surely, in this case, the messenger has to be considered. No less than an archangel with a direct message from God appears to Mary. If the history of art has anything to tell us, the Annunciation must have been one of the top-ten religious experiences of all time. So, perhaps, some of us would be forgiven for thinking: What more do you want? After all, who among us hasn’t at some time asked the Lord for a sign? And if, in response to this request, we received an appearance from say, the archangel Gabriel, with a pretty clear message, well, who really wouldn’t be satisfied with that? Truthfully, the appearance of an angel, any run-of-the-mill angel, would pretty much settle it for most of us.

Not so for Mary. Rather, Mary says, “Umm, excuse me, but how can this be? Remember, I’m not married?” To which, amazingly, the angel Gabriel does not respond by saying, “Well, excuse me missy, but let me remind you that I am an archangel. I stand in the very presence of God. So you are just going to have to take my word for it.” Which is how, perhaps, some of us would respond if we stood in Gabriel’s sandals. But no, Gabriel is a real angel, and so he explains to Mary how this will all take place. The Holy Spirit will come upon her and the power of the Most High will overshadow her.

That the angel Gabriel takes seriously the question of the teenaged Mary and responds tenderly is gracious. That Mary has the courage to ask the question in the first place is inspiring.



It shows genuine faith. God does not overpower us with the full weight of heavenly glory to compel us to believe and to act in faith. What the angel says is not entirely clear to Mary and God honors her question. God invites Mary’s assent. So, when she finally says, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word,” Mary is the model of Christian faith. Blessed are those who hear the word of God and respond like Mary. With wonder and questions and faithful assent.

Also note, Gabriel sends Mary to see her kinswoman, Elizabeth, whose own extraordinary pregnancy will be a sign of the truth of his message. Again, Gabriel could have pulled archangelic rank. But instead, he invites Mary to check out the message with another flesh-and-blood human. Here again, Mary is a model of discipleship. We can’t do it alone. God doesn’t expect us to do it alone. Mary doesn’t just talk with angels. She visits Elizabeth. She helps Jesus along with his first miracle at the wedding at Cana. She stands with the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross. She gathers with the disciples in the upper room awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. Mary is the model of discipleship among the disciples. God gives us families and church families to help along the way. Mary, the Mother of our Lord, was sent to her cousin to be strengthened in her understanding of God’s message. Blessed are those who hear the word of God and respond like Mary.

This is the last Sunday of Advent. Tonight, this worship space will be transformed, and we will celebrate the feast of the Incarnation. But before we sing, “O Come All Ye Faithful,” let’s remember the faith of Mary. Marvel again at the angelic message that Mary will bear a son and name him Jesus and he will be called the Son of the Most High. Wonder with her how this can be. See the gracious sign in a pregnant kinswoman. And hear the heavens rejoice when Mary finally says, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word.” Blessed are those who hear the word of God and respond like Mary.



**Prompts**

1. At the Annunciation, Mary responds with questions and ultimately with faith-filled assent.
  - How do you relate to Mary’s questioning and her eventual response to the angel’s message?
  - How can we learn from Mary’s faith in our own moments of uncertainty or doubt?
  
2. Find a favorite depiction of the Annunciation and reflect on how it moves your spirit. You might consider viewing pieces by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Plautilla Nelli, Sandro Botticelli, Henry Tanner, or John Collier.

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We seek to grow as diverse disciples of Jesus Christ, and to serve Jesus by serving others in the world, guided by the values of Ancient Rites, Open Minds, and Affirming Hearts.



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