

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
955 Main St.
Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
November 29, 2020
First Sunday in Advent

Prelude

Lighting the Candle of Hope

James Walters, Readers

Light a candle before beginning the reading. It does not matter what kind of candle. One of the interesting things about the pandemic is seeing how resourceful people can be.

Read:

Advent is a time of holy expectation. Of waiting. Of preparing for the coming of the Christ Child.

For the four Sundays before Christmas, we prepare ourselves by recalling both the prophecies that foretold of Christ's coming and the gospel stories of his birth. In prayer, we examine our hearts and reflect on our life of faith. We consider the needs of the world, as well as the needs of those close to home. We seek a fresh sense of God's presence and power for the year ahead.

On this first Sunday we light the candle of *hope*.

We light this candle as a sign of the coming light of Christ.

Advent means coming.

The prophet Isaiah announced:

*We are preparing ourselves for the days
when the nations shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore. Isaiah 2:4*

Prayer

Eternal God, through long generations you prepared a way
for the coming of your Son,

and by your Spirit,

you still bring light to illumine our paths.

Renew us in faith and hope

that we may welcome Christ to rule our thoughts

and claim our love,

as Lord of lords and King of kings,

to whom be glory forever. Amen

Book of Common Worship, Westminster, John Knox Press, 1993, Louisville, Ky.

Hymn Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus Charles Wesley

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 every nation, joy of every trembling heart.

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.

Prayer of Confession

God of the future, you are coming in power to bring all nations under your rule.
We confess that we have not expected your kingdom, for we live causal lives, ignoring your
promised judgment. We accept lies as truth, exploit neighbors, abuse the earth, and refuse your
justice and peace. In your mercy, forgive us. Grant us wisdom to welcome your way, and to seek
things that will endure when Christ comes to judge the world.

Take, O Take Me as I Am
Summon out what I shall be.
Set your seal upon my heart
and live in me. Repeat.

Assurance of Pardon

The mercies of the Lord are from everlasting to everlasting. Know you are forgiven and be at
peace.

Scripture Reading Luke 1:1-4, 26-38

The Morning Message

Once in Chicago there was a group of boys, teen-age type, who assembled themselves under the
basketball hoops at their school. They did this almost daily. Good friends. Stayed out of trouble
and were generally good to have around.

On one particular day, a big, tall and bald African American man strode up and asked if he could
play a little with them. They looked him over and said sure, that would be ok.

Then they went to work wearing each other out, an event of sweating and heavy breathing from one end of the playground to the other. The new guy was good. He could jump and run and never missed a shot. But he was not a ball hog and wasn't mean. The boys glanced at each other often during this event. Who is this guy, they silently asked each other, and why would he want to spend time with us?

They suspected he might be that famous basketball star whose initials are MJ, but surely he wouldn't be caught dead on a school playground with a bunch of boys who wouldn't impress anyone with their skills.

So on they ran and jumped and shot and rebounded until the sun went down and it was time to head for home. On the way, they wondered if it could really be MJ or was it just wishful thinking?

Luke goes to great effort to tell his readers that the story we are about to hear is authentic, real. He sets it in a concrete time and place to lend authority to his facts.

In 1968 my grandmother and I went to England to visit my uncle and his family. They lived there off and on for twenty years. Neither of us had a passport, so there was some leg work to be done. Mine was no problem. Grandma's was. She was born in 1916 in Ironton, Ohio. The Lawrence County courthouse had since burned and all records including birth records had been destroyed. So, in order to have proof of her birthplace, birth date and birth parents, she had to find someone who could testify in a court of law to these things.

And she did. She located "Aunt Addie" who was present at the birth of one Phyllis Eileen Parker, on Dec. 14, 1916, in Ironton, Ohio.

That is what Luke is doing here, laying out proof these things took place. They were not conjured up by some religious cult or the teachings of a camel-shirted mystic. The news can be trusted. And before we think that people are immediately enlightened by good tidings of great joy, think again. Remember how often we question just how authentic and reliable our own news is in 2020. The whole year seems like a continuous newsfeed. Some reliable, some not.

Brian Blount, of Union Seminary, reminds us that the Christmas we celebrate today is a far cry from the one the shepherds attended and the angels sang about. He called the first Christmas, the birthday of Jesus, an "edgy thing." This was a radical thing that God was doing, something way out on the edge of wisdom and experience. It was certainly not what an oppressed people had in mind. A baby? A needy little kid? And worse, a poor, needy, probably illegitimate baby?

Yes. When Cyreneous was Governor of Syria in a town called Bethlehem. He grew in wisdom and stature. He assumed a rabbi's life. He spent his days among the people...healing the sick and hurting, comforting the hearts of the bereaved, feeding hungry crowds, pointing the way out of a sinful, destructive life and toward a loving, generous, forgiving God. This was the life the early followers were called to share.

This is the story of our faith and we celebrate it every year, though we may do that differently this year. And I think that may be a good thing. Our lack of Christmas parties and programs may just offer us a little extra time for thoughtful reflection. We could approach this season as a time to ask ourselves if we've grown any this year, learned something new, made a new friend or helped someone.

We may even be brave enough to review our hardships, the moments of pain and struggle, the times we didn't feel like trusting God and we didn't see any need to forgive our debtors.

These are our edges, the gnarly places that have been around every corner this year. How many of us know someone who has lost a job or lost a family member? As compassionate believers, how readily have we shared the good news of Jesus Christ with someone in need or hurting, to take them a plate of something or comfort them when their hearts were breaking? There have been many, many opportunities to skate on that gospel edge this year, too.

Can we trust scripture? Is it still reliable? Can we apply the lessons of the first believers to our 21st century lives? Yes. Mary was only around 15 years old when the angel visited her announcing the news about her pregnancy. What most young women of her day would consider a scandal, a thing of shame, Mary received as a gift. The life she bore, with all its complications, gave life to the world.

I thought about this many times recently. The pandemic has us thinking and planning and behaving differently. But how many of us went to some extra effort to make up for the sense of loss we experienced this Thanksgiving? Did you Zoom or Facetime or text repeatedly on Thursday to let your loved ones know how very much you missed them? To say, "I love you. You are important to me."

We have met enormous challenges in 2020. Edgy realities were forced upon us. But we are Christians. And if this season gives our lives meaning, then we will meet whatever 2021 holds...I am so thankful to be in this life and in this time with all of you.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

God of all years, you have blessed us in so many ways. Our hearts are full of gratitude. Though most of us celebrated Thanksgiving in a different way, apart from loved ones, we are never far from you. Your presence comforts us. As we dedicate ourselves to mindfulness over our health and safety, we have hope that we may soon live with more freedom of movement and freedom from fear.

Our neighbors, friends and family have many needs. Walk alongside them, Lord, as you have done with your people over time, that they might find peace and security in your love and compassion.

As we begin this season of Advent, our hopes are genuine, that you will come in glory to reconcile all things. With a sense of healing and wholeness, we give you all thanks and praise, this day and always, as we pray in Jesus' name, saying, Our Father...Amen.

Blessing

Isaiah 12

Surely God is our salvation, we will trust in God and not be afraid, for the Lord God is our Strength and Might. Shout aloud and sing for joy...for great in our midst is the Holy One of Zion.

Postlude

Announcements

The Worship and Evangelism Committee welcomes your contributions for worship this Advent season. Please contact Cinda Harkless to make arrangements. 304,634.5831(cell/text)