

Synod of the Covenant
Presbytery of Lake Michigan
Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 20, 2020

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"Life is a constant Advent season: we are continually waiting to become, to discover, to complete, to fulfill. Hope, struggle, fear, expectation and fulfillment are all part of our Advent experience.

"The world is not as just, not as loving, not as whole as we know it can and should be. But the coming of Christ and his presence among us—as one of us—give us reason to live in hope: that light will shatter the darkness, that we can be liberated from our fears and prejudices, that we are never alone or abandoned.

"May this Advent season be a time for bringing hope, transformation and fulfillment into the Advent of our lives."

**WELCOME**

Welcome to all of you and to each of you.

If you have strong faith, weak faith, or no faith,  
You are welcome

If you are a child excited about Christmas, or an old curmudgeon who mutters "bah humbug."  
You are welcome

If you are lonely and isolated, or connected and with family,  
You are welcome

The God of grace and promise is delighted that you have joined us today.

**PRELUDE**      **Lo, How A Rose E're Blooming**

*Tamar Mikeladze, piano*

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Praise the LORD, all you nations!  
Extol him, all you peoples!  
For great is his steadfast love toward us,  
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.  
Praise the LORD!

**PSALM 117**

**HYMN #82 (GTG)**

**Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus**

**LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES**

On the First Sunday of Advent we lit our first candle as a sign of the coming light of Christ.

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord!

Make a highway in the desert for our God.

Isaiah 40

From ages of old, no ear has heard, no eye has seen  
one so glorious as the Lord our God, for whom we wait.

Isaiah 64

On the Second Sunday of Advent, we lit the second candle

Every valley shall be lifted,

every mountain and hill, made low;

then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

Isaiah 40

On the Third Sunday of Advent, we lit our third candle:

God's anointed one is coming —

to bring good news to the oppressed,

to bind up the brokenhearted,

to proclaim liberty to the captives,

and to announce the time of the Lord's favor.

Isaiah 61

And today, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we light the fourth candle:

The promise of the Lord is sure

the realm of God will be established forever.

2 Samuel 7

**HYMN #100 (GTG)**

**My Soul Cries Out With a Joyful Shout**

**REMEMBERING OUR BAPTISMS**

The waters of birth eased us into this world

Water keeps us alive in the wilderness

Cleanses our bodies on the dusty journey

And refreshes us at the oasis

Water marks our identity at baptism

Reminds us that God cleanses of our bodies and hearts

It is sign and seal of God's promise to be our God

And that we are God's people.

**CALL TO CONFESSION**

In baptism we are called to be one people.  
In Jesus death the dividing walls of hostility were demolished.  
But:  
We divide ourselves by race, color, social status  
By ideology, political preference, theological continuum  
By gender identity, or national citizenship.  
Who we really are in baptism yearns to be whole,  
Would you join me in our confession together?

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Forgive our attempts to exalt ourselves at the expense of all others who are made in your image. Forgive the labels we use in our attempt to control or put down. Forgive our failure to act justly toward all, to love and show mercy toward all. Cleanse our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus so we may be one again. AMEN**

**Time of Silent Confession**

**ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

**Romans 6**

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? We were baptized into his death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might have new life. In the same way, count yourselves as dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Amen and Amen.

**SPECIAL MUSIC**

**Keep Your Lamps**

**Westminster Church Choir**

**PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION**

Most High God, for you nothing is impossible. Through a poor young woman in a small town you gave birth to your realm of endless glory. By your Holy Spirit, fill us with new life and hope and overshadow us with your power and grace so that we, like Mary, might be your servants, bearing witness to the promise of your Word; through Jesus Christ, who is coming to reign. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE READING – Luke 1:26-38**

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "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." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 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. 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. For nothing will be impossible with God. "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.*

**MESSAGE**

**Endless Possibilities!**

**TIME OF SILENCE AS WE LISTEN TO GOD**

**LIFTING OUR CONCERNS TO GOD**

**HYMN #110 (GTG)**

**Love Has Come**

**\*CHARGE AND BENEDICTION**

**POSTLUDE**

**Ukrainian Bell Choir**

**Tamar Mikeladze, piano**

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"For outlandish creatures like us, on our way to a heart, a brain, and courage, Bethlehem is not the end of our journey but only the beginning - not home but the place through which we must pass if ever we are to reach home at last."

— Frederick Buechner. *The Magnificent Defeat*

This worship service on the fourth Sunday of Advent is brought to you by the Presbytery of Lake Michigan as part of the worship offerings from the presbyteries that comprise the Synod of the Covenant. We thank you for this opportunity to worship with you.

We are indebted to Eastminster Presbyterian of East Lansing, MI for the use of their building, musician and to their technical crew for stitching together the disparate portions of our service. Thanks to their pastor, the Rev. Kristin Stroble, for coordinating these efforts.

We are assisted by the Westminster Church Choir of Westminster Presbyterian, Jackson, MI. Thanks to the Rev. Karen Kelley for coordinating the music.

Our preacher is the Rev. Fran-Lane Lawrence, Transitional Co-Leader/Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan. Leading Worship are the Rev. Dr. Cal Bremer, Transitional Co-Leader of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan and the Rev. Kristin Stroble.