

Come, Let Us Adore Him: Preparations

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael –December 1 2024

1st Sunday of Advent

Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36 NRSVue

Reflection: Psalm 25

Greeting: The Lord is good and does the right thing; he teaches sinners which way they should go. God guides the weak to justice, teaching them his way. All the Lord's paths are loving and faithful for those who keep his covenant and laws. Please, for the sake of your good name, Lord, forgive my sins, which are many! (Psalm 25)

Advent Candle Lighting: We light this candle of hope as a sign of our commitment to pay attention and prepare for the days that are surely coming and are already here—the days when God's kingdom of love, justice, and mercy will reign. Come, let us adore him, Christ our Lord.

Prayer: Merciful God, you sent the prophets as your messengers to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. Give us grace to listen to their warnings and to let our lives be changed through your grace. Help us once more to celebrate the nativity, and that we may rejoice in the coming of Jesus Christ our redeemer. Help us as we reflect on the Preparations and the Passion of Advent so that we might embrace the Presence and Promise of the Christ who comes. May you bring us together to worship in Joy, remembering the comfort of Home as we prepare to look Ahead. Come, let us adore him, Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 25

⁴Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. ⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. ⁶Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. ⁷Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord! ⁸Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. ⁹He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way. ¹⁰All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. (Psalm 25:4-10 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 25, and we hear of God's salvation. That we should seek God so that we can follow his ways. How are you preparing for God's grace this Advent? What is it you are praying about as we reflect on the birth of our Savior? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? In what ways are you preparing for Christmas? What traditions do you hold dear? How is it that you will come to celebrate the birth of our Savior this year?

Prayer: Eternal God, we praise you for your presence with us. You sent your light into the world to dispel the darkness. We pray you will help us in our preparations for the coming of Jesus Christ, our true light. We thank you for your many blessings in this Advent season. We seek you in our prayers this day. We lift up our many joys that we may celebrate with you. We lift up our sorrows that you may wipe away our tears. We lift up both the prayers we have spoken aloud together and the silent pleadings that we hold in our hearts. For we know that you are never far from us and that you hear every prayer we raise to you. May we know your presence in our celebrations and our sorrows, in both laughter and tears. May we remember that you are always with us. May you grant us hope, peace, joy, and love as we celebrate a child born and laid in a manger. May our hearts be overflowing with your steadfast love and faithfulness all the days of our lives. And it is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible Updated Edition. Our first reading is from Jeremiah chapter 33, verses 14 through 16.

14 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16 In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness." (Jeremiah 33:14-16 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 9 through 13.

9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. 11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. 13 And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 21, verse 25 through 36.

25 "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." 29 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not

pass away until all things have taken place. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³⁴“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:25-36 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week marks the beginning of our Advent and Christmas series. It is titled “Come, Let Us Adore Him.” From now through Epiphany, we will explore the ways that we celebrate the birth of our Savior. This week we are focused on our preparations during Advent. This includes a number of things, and those things will change depending on your own home. Because everyone has their own traditions, their own things they do to prepare for Christmas. Our readings for today also highlight our preparations as part of Advent. In our readings, we are called to be ready and to pay attention. We hear about preparing for God’s love. We hear about being ready for justice. And what may be the biggest one of all, during Advent we prepare ourselves for hope. Advent is the beginning of the Christian calendar. We kick things off with a remembrance of the hope that we have in Christ. A hope that is shown to us in the birth of a child. We prepare because it helps us to be in the right mindset. It helps us to truly remember what it is Christ teaches us, and why his birth is important to us. And our readings today bring this idea to life, because I think the other thing that we have to remember is that Advent is not just the celebration of Christ's birth. That we prepare ourselves for his birth, for his life, for his death, for his resurrection, and for his presence with us always. Because Christ is still working with us. And I found hope at the core of our readings for today.

We begin with Jeremiah. Jeremiah speaks of God’s promise, and it is a promise that is still being carried out today. Now initially, we might think that this has come to pass, because we hear that a righteous branch will spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. It's the fulfilling of the promise we see in Christ. But we see that also in Christ now, because Christ is still helping us to execute justice and righteousness, because this promise is one that still gives us hope. It gives us hope for peace, hope for equity, and hope for equality, a hope in justice, a hope in each other when we live a life together in Christ. Because the Lord is our righteousness. God is our guide still. That we remember Christ’s birth so that we remember that God is still active in our lives today. That the Holy Spirit is still helping us to feel those things. That Christ is still inspiring hope today.

This continues in 1 Thessalonians, where we have the hope that we have in God's love. That we cannot thank God enough for all that has been done, for the love that has been shown to us, and the love that we may show each other. And I think this is one of the things that we remember during Advent, because it is a celebration of hope. That we prepare ourselves to be filled once again with the kind of hope that we need. That we are filled with a hope that strengthens us so that we can be prepared to continue to do what is right and what is good. That we remember the birth of Jesus so that we remember the that it can be the smallest of things that changes the world. That when we trust in God’s grace, anything is possible. This is

the hope that we carry with us throughout the year so that we can share the good news of God's Kingdom with everyone that we meet, so that all may find the hope that we see in the birth of our Savior.

We hear about hope in our Gospel reading as well. This can catch some people off guard, because some people read it and don't see hope. They hear about fainting and foreboding and get a sense of dread. This sounds scary. But the hope is there. Because we are not told to cower in fear at the coming of the Son of Man. Instead, we are told to raise our heads high and to look. That we are meant to see this with a sense of hope, because it is our God with us, our Emmanuel. The parable we are told is not one of despair either. It is about paying attention and finding hope. That it is about our own preparations. That if you see the leaves on the fig tree, you know what time it is, that summer is near. In the same way that if we look outside and we see leaves falling from the trees, we know that winter is near. That part of our preparation is to take note of the world around us. We're being called to pay attention so that we know when the kingdom of God is near. That instead of being caught off guard, we should pray and hold tight to the Lord, and that we should have hope, because it is a time that will bring peace. Because this is not about a terrible day, but it is the coming of God's Kingdom. When I think about that, I don't have a sense of fear and foreboding, because I remember the birth of our Savior, a child lying in a manger. Instead of a picture of immense power, we are given the image of a newborn child. That our hope is not placed in power and force. Our hope is placed with love and compassion. Our hope is not in violence, but our hope is in peace. So, we prepare for peace. We prepare for compassion. We prepare for love. We do it all by preparing for hope.

So, as I think about the way that we prepare for Christ's birth, I think about the ways that we can strengthen each other in love and by faith. For me, every year my preparations include things like watching my favorite Christmas movies, because they remind me of God's love. How? Because they remind me of family, they remind me of home, and they remind me of community. They remind me of the way that Christmas can change lives. I bake cookies thinking of the joy that I find in celebrating Christ's birth. I decorate the tree with family, and it reminds me of the many years that we have come together to celebrate the love that we find in Jesus. Because the thing is that we do all sorts of things to prepare for Christmas. I think all of those things are ways of serving Christ, as long as we keep Him in mind when we do them. Because there are plenty of things that we do during Christmas to share love. And isn't sharing love a way of celebrating the birth of our Savior? Because it is a hope that we have and a hope that we share. It is a hope that we carry with us. We prepare for that hope by remembering all that has already been done. We prepare for it by celebrating the traditions that bring us closer together and bring us closer to God. We prepare by remembering God's promise to us: a promise of peace, a promise of safety, a promise of justice.

So let us prepare for the birth of our Savior, that we may prepare for hope. And let us make part of that preparation how we share that hope with others. For Christ came to give us hope. Hope that things can always be better. Hope that we are never alone. It is a hope in our Emmanuel, our God with us. Because God is our hope everlasting. Christ is the hope that we

find when we sing Christmas carols. God's love is the hope that we find when we recognize his presence that is constantly with us. Hope is found in the guidance of the Holy Spirit that draws us together as a community to celebrate the birth of a child. Let us celebrate the hope of Christmas. So come, let us adore Him, Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Come, Let Us Adore Him

This year our Advent series is “Come, Let Us Adore Him.” We reflect on all that we do to remember the gift of our Savior through old stories, favorite songs, and many traditions. This season we reflect on the Preparations and the Passion of Advent so that we might embrace the Presence and Promise of the Christ who comes. And through it all, we will gather to worship in Joy, remembering the comfort of Home as we prepare to look Ahead. So, come, let us adore him.

12/1: Preparations	12/8: Passion	12/15: Presence	12/22: Promise
12/24: Joy	12/29: Home	1/5: Ahead	

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752 Walnut
 PO Box 610
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 Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St
 PO Box 267
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 Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd
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