

Come, Let Us Adore Him: Passion

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael –December 8 2024

2nd Sunday of Advent

Readings: Malachi 3:1-4; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6 NRSVue

Reflection: Luke 1:76-79

Greeting: Bless the Lord God of Israel because he has come to help and has delivered his people. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David's house, just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago. Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace. (Luke 1)

Advent Candle Lighting: We light this candle of peace as a sign of our commitment to passionately pursue the work of making peace in our hearts, our families, our communities, and throughout the earth until God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. 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: Luke 1:76-79

*⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,*

*⁷⁷ to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.*

*⁷⁸ Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,*

*⁷⁹ to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”. (Luke 1:76-79 NRSVue*)*

We read the words of Luke, and we hear of God's mercy. That we should seek God so that we can find peace. We hear of having a passion for the Lord and preparing his way? 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 carry the passion of Christmas with you throughout the year? 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 to have passion 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 Malachi chapter 3, verses 1 through 4.

¹ See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like washers' soap; ³ he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years. (Malachi 3:1-4 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from Philippians chapter 1, verse 3 through 11.

³ I thank my God for every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every one of my prayers for all of you, praying with joy ⁵ for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart, for all of you are my partners in God's grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the tender affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ to help you to determine what really matters, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:3-11 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 3, verse 1 through 6.

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' " (Luke 3:1-6 NRSVue)*

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

This This week is the second Sunday of Advent. As such it is our Sunday where we take a look at the passion that we have for the birth of our Savior. We show this passion in many different ways. I want to start with a definition of the term passion because this can throw people off sometimes. It is an intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction. This is the definition I was thinking about because it gives us a place where we can understand the emotional connection we have to the birth of Christ and the passion that we have in sharing God's love with others. That for me, sharing God's love is an intense feeling and it is a driving part of my life, so I think passion is the right word. That passion can take many different forms. Just like our traditions have many different forms, our passion takes on different forms with how we show that we are thankful for the birth of Christ and for the love that God has shown us. We hear different versions of passion in each of today's readings.

Malachi tells us that God is preparing to send a messenger and that this messenger of the covenant is coming. But Malachi asks an important question. "Who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?" He asks this because embracing that day requires change and change is hard. Especially when we try to go it alone, when we try to do things ourselves. When he asks, "who can endure?" the answer is we can. Not because we are so amazing and fantastic on our own but because we don't go it alone. Because Christmas is the celebration of our Emmanuel, God with us. It is that idea of God being with us that lets us think about the way that we are refined in the fire. It's not that we hop in the fire and refine ourselves. I have yet to see silver refine and purify itself. But God can take us and help us to change to be more loving, to be more merciful, to be more compassionate, to have a passion for justice and righteousness. God refines us but because God is with us, we can endure. Because of God's presence with us, we can have that passion. We can follow wherever God leads us. So, when God leads us to a child born and laid in a manger, our hearts can be changed by that event.

We see it in Paul's letter to the Philippians. That the work will always continue because of our Emmanuel, our God with us. Paul holds everyone in his heart knowing that all who help him are partners in God's grace, just as we are partners in God's grace. We hold each other in our hearts when we think about the love that we find in the birth of our Savior. Paul prays that others will be overflowing with love. That they will be overflowing with knowledge and full of insight. All of this is so that they can decide what really matters. We should make sure that our

passion is for the right things so that we can be pure and blameless, just as if we were refined in a fire. Just as if we are made righteous in Christ our Lord. That we share the affection that we find in Christ because it helps us to be brothers and sisters in Christ. It helps us to be partners in sharing the love and the faithfulness that we find in our Savior. That we can be passionate for God's love. That we can be passionate about sharing the lessons that Christ has taught us.

We hear it in Luke. We hear about John the Baptist. John is in the wilderness and the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah as he was in the wilderness. So, he goes, and he proclaims a baptism for repentance and the forgiveness of sins. And he is out there just like Isaiah talked about. The voice of one crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight. John's passion is for sharing repentance. His passion is for bringing people to God. His passion is letting others know they can be forgiven. John is a messenger there in the wilderness, sharing the truth of Christ. He is sharing the love of God. That he is out there doing God's work because the word of God came to him and he has a passion for that word. John is busy proclaiming the kingdom of God and the one that will bring it near.

These examples of passion help us to think about the ways that we can be passionate about Christmas. Advent is a time where we prepare ourselves and we prepare ourselves for the birth of Christ. We prepare because, though it's an event that already happened, it's an event that we celebrate every year because we remember what it means. We remember how it moves us. We remember how it grips us. Now, your passion can be shown in many different ways. Maybe you aren't a John the Baptist and going out to the wilderness and baptizing people in the river is not your cup of tea. I'm not sure how good I would be at it. Maybe you're not as strong as Paul and you're not sure that you can face imprisonment. Maybe you aren't wanting to spend your life traveling from place to place. Maybe you aren't like Malachi, hearing the word of the Lord and proclaiming it to the people, even if it's not something they want to hear. But those are just three examples of the way that our passion plays out. And I have to be honest, I have seen the passion that all of you have for celebrating Christ in your lives. I have seen it in hats and gloves that have been donated for those who are in need. I have seen that passion in the items collected for children so that they can have a wonderful Christmas and know they are loved. I have seen it in the number of things collected for the community One-Stop Christmas with the number of diapers and wipes that we have collected. I see it in the ways that you all volunteer to help others. I know you have a passion. A passion for loving your neighbor as yourself and a passion for loving God, just as Jesus taught. Our passion can take all sorts of forms. Taking meals to those in need. Giving to someone on a street corner. Being there for somebody who needs someone to listen. Even the simple act of wishing someone a Merry Christmas and to have a wonderful day can show the passion that you have for sharing kindness to others. Because sometimes a kind word makes all the difference in one's day. This is the passion that I yearn for and the passion that I see when we celebrate the birth of our Savior.

Advent is when we prepare ourselves to be full of that love and that light. The light that comes from celebrating our Emmanuel. Not our God far away. Not our God hiding in a corner. Not our God only found in a book. But God with us. With us in what we do, with us in what we say, with us in how we treat others. That when we are a people of love others can see it and others can know it. And when we are a people of Christ's love people see it and they know the love of Christ in their lives. Your passion for doing what is right and what is good is some of the best testimony people will ever get about Jesus Christ and his birth. Because it doesn't tell them what happened long ago, it tells them what is right now. It doesn't tell them what you believe as much as it tells them how you live out that belief. And it means they can see what a life in Christ is and that is a wonderful and glorious thing to see. I pray that we may all have that kind of passion in the year to come. I pray that we may all share in the love so that all may know of the light that overcomes the darkness because of our Savior. Because of the birth of a child that sets us free from slavery to sin and death. That the birth of a child gives us hope and lets us find peace. It is a peace we share because we know the love of God that is there for each and every one of us. It is a peace that we share with others. Because we know we are loved, we may love others. This is the peace that we may share. Because we know we are forgiven, we may forgive others. That we care because Christ cares for us. So let us come together that we may celebrate the passion that we have for the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. So come, let us adore him Christ the 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	

Neoga Grace UMC

752 Walnut
 PO Box 610
 Neoga, IL 62447
 (217)895-2809
 Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St
 PO Box 267
 Toledo, IL 62468
 Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd
 Mattoon, IL 61938
 Worship 9:30am

Rev Camron D St.Michael
<https://stmichael.pw>
cdstmichael@outlook.com
 (316)530-3182 (call or text)
 PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

* Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.