

Come, Let Us Adore Him: Promise

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael –December 22 2024

4th Sunday of Advent

Readings: Micah 5:2-5a; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45 NRSVue

Reflection: Luke 1:46-55

Greeting: With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me. He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed. (Luke 1)

Advent Candle Lighting: We light this candle of love as a sign of our commitment to live as people of God's promise, a promise of salvation and flourishing for all people that springs forth from God's love for all creation.

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 1:46-55

⁴⁶ And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; ⁵⁰ indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. ⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."
(Luke 1:46-55 NRSVue*)

We read the words of Luke, and we hear of God's promise. That we know the love that God has for his people. We hear of the inspiration that God is for the least and the last. That we should praise God for his mighty deeds. 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? How are you experiencing the promise of Christ's birth during this Advent? 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 the promise that you made through 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 Micah chapter 5, verses 2 through 5a.

²But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. ³Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, ⁵and he shall be the one of peace. (Micah 5:2-5a NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from Hebrews chapter 10, verse 5 through 10.

⁵Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; ⁶in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷Then I said, 'See, I have come to do your will, O God' (in the scroll of the book it is written of me)." ⁸When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), ⁹then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:5-10 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 1, verse 39 through 45.

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (Luke 1:39-45 NRSVue)*

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

This is our final Sunday of Advent, and this week we look at promise. What are we looking at as we prepare ourselves for Christmas? We are looking at the promise of the coming of the Christ child. We're looking at God's promise of salvation. We're looking at the promise made that lifts up the least and the last, the promise of God's kingdom. But we also look at the promise that we make as part of our celebration of Christmas. A promise that we will keep going and keep enduring. It is also a promise that we will share what we have with the next generation. That Christmas will be a time of hope. A time for peace. A time for joy. A time of love. Our readings today highlight the different ways that we look at that promise. Because in them we hear of God's promise in many different ways, and how we are to understand those promises. We hear about the promises made that we remember, the promises we look forward to, and the promises we keep.

We start with Micah. With the prophet Micah, we hear about God's promise not to forget a little clan of Judah. It is a reminder that even this small out-of-the-way place matters, because God can take those small things and make them important. God can remind us that sometimes it's the smallest of things and the smallest of places that makes the biggest difference. We hear that in this talking of Bethlehem. That one of peace will come from Bethlehem. And that the people will know that God's kingdom is near. That the strength of the Lord is near for the people. And that the Messiah is on his way. The promise that we have is that God doesn't forget anyone. God doesn't forget anywhere. And at the same time, God does not forget you or me.

We hear it in Hebrews. And we hear it in this promise that we are more important than the law. That we are more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices. That the law prescribes what it is we are supposed to do to be right with God. It is Christ that offers himself as a reminder of God's love for us. That it is not God's love for sacrifice that redeems us. It is not God's love for burnt offerings that gives us salvation. It is the love that God has for his people. A love we see manifested in a baby born and laid in a manger. That Christ, our Emmanuel, shows us the way. By reminding us of the promise of God's kingdom. A place where we all belong. A place where we all may find comfort and joy A place where peace reigns. A place that Christ prepares for us for what God has in store. A place in God's kingdom.

We hear of promise in our reading from Luke. Where we hear about Mary going to visit Elizabeth, her cousin. And John the Baptist leaps for joy in Elizabeth's womb. And Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaims that Mary is blessed among women and blessed is the fruit of her womb. That she is celebrating that the Lord is near. That the promised coming is at hand. That she is there to witness such a wonderful event. And it gives us a look ahead. Because it is quite literally John the Baptist celebrating what is to come. And we know that John, from here, ends up in the river Jordan baptizing people with a baptism of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. That John is preparing the way for the one that comes after. And that one is the Christ. That he prepared the way just as he should. That John always rejoices at knowing that the Messiah is at hand.

Now, all of these things lead us into Christmas. Advent is a time of preparation. It is a time we prepare ourselves so that we can celebrate the birth of Jesus. That we can celebrate our Emmanuel. And I know I have been saying that a lot during this Advent. But it's because I want us to remember that this is not a celebration of what was only long ago. This is not a celebration only of a past event that is not with us this day. Our Emmanuel is our God with us. And that itself is a promise. A promise that we are never alone. A promise that we are never standing by ourselves. That God is with us in all that we do. So that when we go to do what is right and what is good, God is there with us. When we go to help someone, God is there helping us to help them. When we stand up for what is right, even if we feel we are standing alone, we know that we stand with Christ. Because God is with us. No matter what we do, the Holy Spirit is there to guide us because God is with us. That is part of the promise of Christmas. It is part of the promise made to us that we may celebrate the Lord in our midst. That we may celebrate the coming kingdom of God. That we celebrate hope, peace, joy, and love when we celebrate the birth of a child born and laid in a manger. And that we do not come together just to celebrate his birth, because we celebrate his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, and the life that we find in him.

Christmas is almost upon us. It is not far off now. Just a few more days. And I know there's excitement in the air. And if you're not sure about the excitement, ask a child. They remember how to be excited. And it got me to thinking. Especially because I was thinking about the children's program. I was thinking about all the things that the kids are going to be doing both here and at home. All the things the kids will do on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day. All the ways that we come together to celebrate Christmas. And I think about the promise that we make to the next generation. Because it's a promise that we will continue to make sure that we celebrate the birth of a child. That we do so by remembering that God's kingdom has come near. By remembering that God is a God of peace and a God of justice. That our God is not one that sits still waiting, but our God is a God of action. That our God is not a God far away and unreachable. Our God walks with us. That the kingdom of God is not some far-off idea, but the kingdom of God has come near. That's the message I remember in the promise that is made on Christmas. Because it is the promise that God is close to us. And that we see it in the birth of a child. A child that will need help growing up. A child that is going to grow in years and in stature. In wisdom and understanding. A child that will need help. Because when we remember the birth of our Savior, it reminds us of all the children that need our help. All the

children that need someone to care. All the children that need all of the help that they can get. Because we remember our Savior.

So, this year, as we head into Christmas, I ask you to remember the promise that we make so that others may know that Christ is there for them. That God's kingdom is near. That they are loved. That they are valued. That we are called to celebrate. And so, we should celebrate God's promise that we are never alone. And we celebrate it by joining together. That we may celebrate the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ. When we spend our time preparing for his birth. When we have a passion for God's justice. When we let our presence be known and we are aware of our surroundings. And when we remember the promise made and the promise that we hold dear. To be with our God. To love our neighbor as ourselves as we love God. And that we do all of those things to draw us closer together in Christ. Because when we share a life in Christ, we share in everything that matters. And it makes it easy to be able to carry out. It makes it easy to be able to pass all of our traditions and our experiences along. That every generation that comes may celebrate the birth of a child. 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	

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Toledo UMC

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Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

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