

Trinity-Grace United Church
December 24th, 2023
Fourth Sunday in Advent: "LOVE"

GATHERING

PRELUDE

WELCOME

THE JESSE TREE

The symbols for the fourth week of Advent are:

Lion and Lamb (Isaiah): Isaiah 6: 1-10; 7: 1-17; 9: 2-7

Potter at Work (Jeremiah): Jeremiah 18: 1-11

Drop of Water (John the Baptist): Mark 1: 4-9; Luke 1: 5-25, 57-80

Carpenter's Tools (Joseph): Matthew 1: 18-25; 13: 55

Pregnant Woman (Mary): Luke 1: 26-56; 2: 1-7

Dove (The Holy Spirit): Mark 1: 9-11

INTROIT: "The Whole World is Waiting" *(Words & Music: The Many - used by permission)*

OPENING RESPONSES:

(One/All)

Greetings, and welcome to all who watch and wait for love to find us here and now.

Love dwells among us, between us, around us, and through us.

Come and find love in the light of salvation and darkness of rest!

God made both light and darkness - and it was very good.

Ready your soul to be filled with good things as we gather to worship the living God.

We are ready. Let us worship in spirit, in word, and in song.

CANDLE LIGHTING

Sing: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

O come, dear child of Mary, come,
God's Word made flesh within our earthly home.
Love, stir within the womb of night
As shepherds stir and angels put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice!
Take heart and do not fear,
God's love and light
in human form draw near.

Tune: Veni Emmanuel

Lighting the Candles of Hope, Peace and Joy

One/All:

In our most desperate times, by day or by night, the hope of Christ may be found.
We watch and we wait to witness the hope of heaven making a place here on earth.

We light the candle of hope, because hope has come to us.

The candle of Hope is lit

When we are overwhelmed with conflict without or within, we turn to the peace of Christ, that peace which the world cannot give.

Today we light the candle of peace, because peace has come to us.

The candle of Peace is lit

Whether we find ourselves in the dark, cozy realm of nighttime or the blazing brightness of day, God's good message of joy has come to us to cheer our hearts.

We light the candle of joy, celebrating the good news of a baby to be born in Bethlehem.

The candle of Joy is lit

Love, the mightiest force in all the world, was also gentle enough to inhabit a tiny baby. And this mighty force compelled Jesus to demonstrate his love in his transformative message and sacrificial life.

Today we light the candle of love, which reminds us that when all else fails, when hope seems lost, when the night seems eternal, love is what remains.

The candle of Love is lit

Welcome, love of Christ.

Expand our capacity to give and receive love.

Prayer *(Leader)*

God of lovingkindness,
what love you have shown us
that we may be called your children—
each of us created in your likeness,
yet expressing your character in infinite diversity.

You love us, all of us, even the parts of us we struggle to love,
even the people we struggle to love,
even the people groups we struggle to love.
You call us your children and you, our loving parent,
our Father, our Mother, our sibling—
the divine spark living inside us.

And when we wonder how to love each other or ourselves,
you have given us Love Incarnate, Jesus Christ,
to show the way.

May love be among us today.

Amen.

Response: MV 220

Love shines in the solitary star,
Faith is the inner light;
You and I together mirror the Light of lights,
And illumine the pathway home.

HYMN: "People, Look East"

VU 9

- 1 People, look east. The time is near
 of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today:
 Love the guest is on the way.

- 2 Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare,
 one more seed is planted there:
give up your strength the seed to nourish,
that in course the flower may flourish.
People, look east and sing today:
 Love the rose is on the way.

- 3 Birds, though you long have ceased to build,
 guard the nest that must be filled;
even the hour when wings are frozen
God for fledging time has chosen.
People, look east and sing today:
 Love the bird is on the way.

- 4 Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim
 one more light the bowl shall brim,
shining beyond the frosty weather,
bright as sun and moon together.
People, look east and sing today:
 Love the star is on the way.

5 Angels, announce with shouts of mirth
Christ who brings new life to earth.
Set every peak and valley humming
with the word, the Lord is coming.
People, look east and sing today:
Love the Lord is on the way.

PRAYER FOR WHOLENESS

(One/All)

God of lovingkindness,
you showed us a way of love and compassion,
yet so often we choose apathy, ignorance, prejudice, or even hate.

**We confess the harmful words and thoughts, and careless deeds
we at times foist upon each other.**

We confess all the ways our unloving stances
leak out upon other humans, made in your image.
We confess our long history of associating
lightness with goodness and darkness with evil,
for we know good and evil may be found in light and dark places,
among all kinds of people.

**Forgive us, God, and call us to a deeper understanding
of what it means to love one another.**

(Silence is held)

A WORD OF GRACE

(Leader)

God is love, and we find God when we love one another.
We take a moment now to reach out in love,
and pass a word of peace to those around you,
whether here, online, or in your heart in prayer.

SHARING PEACE

One: May the peace of Christ be with you all!

All: And also with you!

We take a moment to greet each other and share a sign of peace

ENCOUNTERING THE WORD

PRAYER FOR UNDERSTANDING

(One)

God of grace,

you speak words of hope in the midst of anxious times.

Send your Holy Spirit to open our ears to that hope.

Give us wisdom to read our own times

through the lens of your grace,

and find comfort and courage through Christ,

your Living Word. Amen.

LESSONS & CAROLS:

READING: Isaiah 62: 6-11 *Prepare the Way*

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,

I have posted sentinels;

all day and all night

they shall never be silent.

The Lord has sworn by his right hand

and by his mighty arm:

I will not again give your grain

to be food for your enemies,

and foreigners shall not drink the wine

for which you have laboured;

but those who garner it shall eat it

and praise the Lord,

and those who gather it shall drink it
in my holy courts.

Go through, go through the gates,
prepare the way for the people;
build up, build up the highway,
clear it of stones,
lift up an ensign over the peoples.

The Lord has proclaimed
to the end of the earth:
'See, your salvation comes.'

CAROL: "Joy to the World" VU 59 (verses 1, 2, 4)

- 1 Joy to the world! the Lord is come:
let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.
- 2 Joy to the earth! the Saviour reigns:
let all their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
- 4 He rules the earth with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

READING: Isaiah 9: 2-7 *A child has been born for us*

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest.

For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

CAROL: "See, Amid the Winter's Snow" VU 76 (verses 1, 4, 5)

1 See amid the winter's snow,
 born for us on earth below,
 see, the tender Lamb appears,
 promised from eternal years.

Refrain:

*Hail, thou ever-blessed morn;
hail, redemption's happy dawn;
sing through all Jerusalem,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.*

4 'As we watched at dead of night,
lo, we saw a wondrous light;
angels singing 'Peace on earth'
told us of the Saviour's birth.' *Refrain*

5 Sacred infant, all divine,
what a mighty love was thine,
thus to come from highest bliss
into such a world as this! *Refrain*

READING: Isaiah 40: 1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

Speak tenderly to my children,
and cry to her that she has served her term.

A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

A voice says, 'Cry out!'

And I said, 'What shall I cry?'

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

Get you up to a high mountain,
herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
'Here is your God!'

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

CAROL: "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentle Ones"

God rest you merry, gentle ones,
let nothing you dismay,
remember Christ our Savior
was born on Christmas Day
to save us all from Satan's pow'r
when we were gone astray.

Refrain:

*O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

From God our heav'nly Father
a blessed angel came

and unto certain shepherds
brought tidings of the same;
how that in Bethlehem was born
the Son of God by name. *Refrain*

Now to the Lord sing praises
all you within this place,
and with true love for one and all
each other new embrace;
this holy season of goodwill
Rejoicing in God's grace. *Refrain*

READING: John 1 (selected verses) *The light is coming into the world*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and
without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to
testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from
Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?'

23 He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
"Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory
as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

CAROL: Wendat (Huron) Carol

Words: D L Seaborn (2018)

We gather at midwinter dark to share this hallowed night.
Within our longhouse, warm and dry, the fire glows with light.
Our Elders sing a teaching song;
it fills the night that seems so long:

This is our sacred home, 'neath heaven's dome,
shining stars proclaim the dawn.

Sky Woman came down from above, but found no place to stand,
till Toad put mud on Turtle's back, and that became the land.

Sky Woman died in giving birth;
her holy body fed the earth.

This is our sacred home, 'neath heaven's dome,
shining stars proclaim the dawn.

A valiant Little Turtle rode a cloud up to the sky;
she used the lightning to make fire, and made our Sun to shine.

He journeys 'neath the world we see,
returns to make the shadows flee.

This is our sacred home, 'neath heaven's dome,
shining stars proclaim the dawn.

The Black Robes came from lands afar, and told us of a day
Judea had been colonized, and Rome must be obeyed.

A mother bore a child of light;
rejoicing filled the starlit night:

This is our sacred home, 'neath heaven's dome,
shining stars proclaim the dawn.

Rejoice! Have courage one and all! The stars shine overhead,
the same stars that shone down upon a baby's humble bed.

The infant grew to be a man;
his words, like stars, light many lands.

This is our sacred home, 'neath heaven's dome,
shining stars proclaim the dawn.

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REFLECTION by Rev. Sandra Nixon

RESPONDING

HYMN: ““Angels We Have Heard on High” VU 38 (verses 1,3)

During the hymn, the offering box is brought forward

- 1 Angels we have heard on high
sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and the mountains in reply,
echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

- 3 Come to Bethlehem and see
Christ whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee
Christ, the Lord, the newborn King.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

OFFERING OUR GIFTS

Trinity-Grace is grateful for the many ways we are gifted and called to contribute to God's mission through this faith community.

Prayer of Dedication

(Leader)

God of lovingkindness,
we love because you first loved us.
Your love inspires us to give generously.
Guide our community to use these gifts
to radiate your love into our community
and out to your beloved world.
In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

CONNECTING IN COMMUNITY

We share announcements, insights, joys & concerns.

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Periods of silence will be left for you to offer your own prayers

THE PRAYER OF THE DISCIPLES (The Lord's Prayer)

You can use the words printed in the order of service, or pray in whatever words or language you would prefer...

(All)

**Our loving Source of life,
may your name be held sacred by all creation.
May your reign come, and your holy will be done,
here among us,
as in the great communion of saints.**

**Provide what we need to sustain us this day.
Forgive our sins,
as we forgive the hurts others cause us.
Keep us from trials too great to bear,
and strengthen us to resist evil.**

**For yours is the realm of love,
yours the energy of life,
and yours the true essence of all that is,
now and always.
Amen.**

HYMN: "Hope Is a Star"

VU 7

1 Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.

Refrain:

*When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.*

2 Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,

giving a promise of safety and worth.

Refrain:

*When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.*

3 Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,
telling the world that the Saviour is born.

Refrain:

*When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.*

4 Love is a flame that burns in our heart,
Jesus has come and will never depart.

Refrain:

*When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.*

AFFIRMATION OF LOVE

(One/All)

Siblings in Christ, let us proclaim the Love of our faith:

Love is patient. Love is kind.

Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

**There is no fear in love,
but perfect love casts out fear.**

And we are convinced

that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

SENDING

(Leader)

May we go into this Christmas Eve
with the courage to welcome Christ into every part of our lives,
so that, like Mary, we will hope for a better world,
like Elizabeth, the Shepherds, and the Holy Family,
we will be brave and bold in our living,
like the Innkeeper and animals, we will be welcoming of others,
and like the Magi, we will present our best selves.

BLESSING

SUNG RESPONSE

As our worship concludes, our prayers rise as we sing:

**In this season filled with expectation
We await the holy child;
God who comes to dwell among us
Bringing love to earth beguiled.
As God's people, may we go
To the world, Christ's love to show.**

(Tune: VU 62)

POSTLUDE