

Trinity-Grace United Church
December 3rd, 2023
First Sunday in Advent

*“We all carry a cave, a hidden place within us, into which God longs to be born.
Advent is a season to enter that place, to turn inward and encounter Love’s presence
who seeks to emerge through us.”*

- Jan Richardson

GATHERING

PRELUDE

WELCOME

THE JESSE TREE

The symbols for the first week of Advent are:

Sun (Creation): Genesis 1

Apple (Adam and Eve): Genesis 2: 4 to 3: 24

Ark and rainbow (Noah): Genesis 6: 1 to 9: 17

Stars (Abraham and Sarah): Genesis 15: 1-6

Water jar (Isaac and Rebecca): Genesis 24

Ladder (Jacob): Genesis 28: 10-22

Seal (Tamar): Genesis 38: 1-30

INTROIT: “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”

OPENING RESPONSES:

(One/**All**)

From generation to generation,

God has been among the people.
**From generation to generation,
God has been revealed to us.**

From generation to generation,
we have sung the songs of liberation.
**From generation to generation,
we have heard the stories of God incarnate, God enfleshed.**

Let us sing of our Redeemer who sets the people free.
Let us tell the living stories again and again.
**Let us come together in praise;
Let us call his name Immanuel, God-is-with-us.**

CANDLE LIGHTING

Sing: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

**O come, O come, Emmanuel
Refresh us at your life-giving well.
All people long to feel your grace,
Pour out your Spirit on every place.**

**Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
shall come to thee wherever you may dwell.**

Words by Juanita L. Austin – Nov. 29 2017 (used with permission) | Tune: Veni Emmanuel

Proclamation (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
make a place here on earth.
Today we light the candle of hope:

All: Because hope continues to emerge among us.

The Advent Candle of Hope is lit

One: Come, hope of heaven!

**All: We lift our eyes with expectation.
Where will we find you today?**

Prayer

(Leader)

Light of the World and Shadow of Safety,
you created light and darkness for our good.
As we enter this season of Advent,
waiting in the darkness for the light of the world,
we find you all around us.
We join together to praise you today,
to hear from your Spirit,
and to meet Christ at your table of life.

Open our hearts and minds to hear what you have to say to us today.
Open our hearts and minds to release our concerns to your loving care.
And open our hearts and minds to the possibility and promise of Hope,
As we prepare for and anticipate the emergence of your realm of love,
in us and throughout your world. Amen.

Response: "Hope Shines in the Solitary Star" (MV 220)

**Hope 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: "God of Still Waiting" (MV20)

1. God of still waiting, God of deep longing,

**God of the heart's true rest:
hold us in fathomless peace,
guard us with unwaning love.**

- 2. Spirit of promise, Spirit of purpose,
Spirit of ceaseless prayer:
bathe us in life full and free,
kindle our wonder and hope.**
- 3. Word who comes to us, Word who lives with us,
Word who disturbs and heals:
silence our chattering fears,
waken our unconscious faith.**
- 4. Word true and faithful, hope-bringing Spirit,
God of enfolding love:
come in your fullness and grace;
work through our lives for your praise.**

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PRAYER FOR WHOLENESS

(One/All)

Light of the World and Shadow of Safety,
we humble ourselves to pray.

**You created us to be reflections of your love and justice,
but we often reflect our own fears and prejudices.
We are people of love and fear;
We are people of anger and joy.
We are people of compassion and self-absorption.
We are your complicated, yet beloved people.**

Forgive us, God.
Hear us as we offer our own prayers for grace...

(Silence is held)

A WORD OF GRACE

SHARING PEACE

One: May the peace of Christ,
God's message of hope to a weary world,
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.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Mark 13: 19-37

19 For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be.

21 And if anyone says to you at that time, “Look! Here is the Messiah!” or “Look! There he is!”—do not believe it. **22** False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. **23** But be alert; I have already told you everything.

24 ‘But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,

25

and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. **27** Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 ‘From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. **29** So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. **30** Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. **31** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 ‘But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **33** Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his workers in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

35 Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the head of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, **36** or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. **37** And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.’

One: For the living word of God in scripture,
and among us, and within us:

All: Thanks be to God!

EXPLORING THE WORD

- Rev. Sandra Nixon

RESPONDING

HYMN: "God in the Darkness" (VU 17)

- 1. God in the darkness, God beyond our knowing,
patient creator, seed in secret growing, rock of the living,
water ever flowing, come and renew us.**
- 2. God in the darkness, God in all our grieving, friend of our
tears, companion never leaving, drawing us past the
limits of believing, come and renew us.**
- 3. God in the darkness, God of holy dreaming, giver of
hope, and pledge of our redeeming, Spirit of truth, our
memory and meaning, come and renew us.**

During the hymn, the offering box is brought forward

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 Hope,
Light of the World and Nurturing Womb of Safety,
to you belong the lights sustaining us
and the vastness of the universe surrounding us.

Take our offerings of time and skills and treasure and multiply them.
Guide us to use these gifts with wisdom and compassion,
to the glory of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

CONNECTING IN COMMUNITY

We share announcements, insights, joys & concerns.

HYMN: "All Who Hunger" (VU 460) - v.1&2

- 1 All who hunger, gather gladly;
 holy manna is our bread.
Come from wilderness and wandering.
 Here, in truth, we will be fed.
You that yearn for days of fullness,
 all around us is our food.
Taste and see the grace eternal.
 Taste and see that God is good.**

- 2 All who hunger, never strangers;
 seeker, be a welcome guest.
Come from restlessness and roaming.
 Here, in joy, we keep the feast.
We that once were lost and scattered
 in communion's love have stood.
Taste and see the grace eternal.
 Taste and see that God is good.**

SHARING GOD'S FEAST In the Sacrament of Communion

Invitation to the Table

Even as we watch and wait for the coming of our True Hope, Christ prepares a table for us. Christ's bread of life and cup of blessing are available to all who desire to be fed by the feast. This is our great hope. And so, you are welcome at the

table, wherever you are on your journey, wherever you come from, whatever your level of understanding. All willing hearts are welcome.

The Great Thanksgiving

(One/All)

One: God be with you.

All: And also with you.

One: Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them up to God.

One: Let us give thanks to our loving God.

All: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

(Leader):

It is good and right that we give thanks to you, O God – the One who comes to us in a burning bush, in an angel’s song, in a newborn child, in a voice crying in the wilderness. You who cannot be locked in a church, not even in the sanctuary; You come to us in ever-new and surprising ways.

You choose to be present wherever and however you will, with no constraints, no predictability. You enter into hearts and lives like a light piercing the dark, kindling the flames of hope and light in your people.

In each heart lies a Bethlehem, an inn where we must ultimately answer whether or not there is room for You. When we are Bethlehem-bound, we can no longer look the other way, conveniently avoiding the stars, closing our ears to the voices of angels and prophets.

In all that comes with this season, we strain to listen for the brush of angels’ wings. This Advent, let us watch and wait, as we make our way to Bethlehem and to the miracle of God born among us.

And so with all who have gone before, and with the angels we praise Your name together, singing:

Sanctus (MV 203)

**O holy, holy, holy God,
O God of time and space.
All earth and sea and sky above
bear witness to your grace.**

**Hosanna in the highest heav'n,
Creation sings your praise.
And blessed is the One who comes
And bears your name always!**

(Leader)

Light of the World, you are holy.
Shadow of Safety, you are powerful and mighty.
Just as you guided Israel as a pillar of fire at day
and a pillar of cloud at night, you guide us through darkness and light.
And you guided Jesus, from his incarnation in Bethlehem,
through his baptism, temptation, and ministry,
even as he prepared for pain and loss.

The Prayers of the People

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

We, too, know pain and loss in our lives, and carry our concern as well for those people, places and situations where there is loneliness, despair, fear, violence, deprivation, illness, grief and loss of hope.

Holy God of Mystery,
We sometimes forget that the earth
and all that is contained within it belongs to you.
We pray for an ever present reminder that each one of us as individuals,
together with all of our human and creation siblings are precious to you.
Open our eyes and hearts to the sacred within everyone we meet.
We are all the blessed work of the Potter's hand.

We pray for a world where everyone sees your image in each other,
and all as your beloved.

We pray for perseverance in times of struggle.
Give to us courage to name what we see,
to endure and persist until mercy and justice succeed.
As you work for those who wait for you,
help us to wait actively, drawing on your holy strength
for patience, courage, mercy, and hope.

We pray for a world where compassion is the driving force.

Where there is scorn among neighbours,
we pray for peace built on deep respect and understanding.
We pray for the breaking of barriers that human beings
have placed before their siblings, and in their place
let us build with you a nation of neighbours committed
to the wellbeing of all.

Light of the World and Shadow of Safety,
attend the joys and concerns of your people with both the light of your salvation
and the protective shadow of your love.
And open our own hearts to how we may partner with you
to accompany our friends, family, and neighbours through both
joyful and difficult times, and to live into your justice
through our witness, advocacy and action.
Amen.

All this we pray in Christ's name, and I invite us to say together now
the Prayer of the Disciples:

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

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

(Leader)

Immanuel, God-with-us, and God of our ancestors,
we speak these ancient words,
we live these ancient stories,
knowing the power of your presence is as potent today as it was long ago.
So we tell the story of that long, dark night when Jesus taught his followers
how to remember him, as they gathered in an upper room for a meal together.

And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread,
blessed it and broke it, and shared it with them saying,

“Take, eat: this is my body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me.”

In the same way after supper he took the cup and after giving thanks,
shared it with his friends, saying:

“Drink this, all of you. This is my life which is which is poured out for you.
Whenever you do this, remember me.”

Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith:

(MV 204)

**Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!
Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!**

(Leader)

God our Loving Parent,
meet us here as we share these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the life and blessing of Christ,
May this ageless meal of bread and wine fill us up with hope,
overflowing with sincere devotion to the world you are creating
in us and around us.

Holy Spirit, just as you spoke to Jesus in the wilderness,
to Mary in her solitude, and to our own elders in their prayers,
speak to our hearts.
Guide us into truth.
Jesus, our friend and brother, our redeemer and peace,
may we grow to know you better,
Help us care for one another and for our community,
until love and justice reign and we feast at the heavenly banquet together.

To Christ, our example and teacher,
to the Almighty Creator,
to the Holy Spirit, our comforter,
be glory and praise forever and ever.

(MV 205)

**Amen, Amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and Amen!
Amen, Amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and Amen!**

One: These are the gifts of God for the family of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Distribution of the elements

Communion is distributed - all are welcome to participate.

In person:

Please stay seated for communion. Servers will be bringing around pieces of gluten free bread and cups of grape juice. Please hold onto them! We will be eating and drinking together.

Online:

Please have a piece of bread and a cup of grape juice (or your preferred substitutes) ready to consume at the prompting of the worship leader.

Hymn during the Distribution: "One Bread, One Body" (VU 467)

Refrain:

**One bread, one body, one Lord of all,
one cup of blessing which we bless;
and we, though many, throughout the earth,
we are one body in this one Lord.**

- 1** **Gentile or Jew, servant or free,
woman or man, no more. *Refrain***

- 2** **Many the gifts, many the works,
one in the Lord of all. *Refrain***

- 3** **Grain for the fields, scattered and grown,
gathered to one, for all. *Refrain***

COMMUNION

(Leader)

Jesus, Christ, our alpha and omega,
eternal word and love incarnate,
is present to us in this bread.

We receive now a life offered in love,
bread for our journey.

All: Amen. (*The bread is eaten*)

(Leader):

Jesus, Christ, the one who redeems us
and calls us by name,
now meets us in this cup.

We receive now a life poured out for the world;
a cup of blessing and new life.

All: Amen. (*The juice is consumed*)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

(Leader)

Illumination of the World and Shadow of Safety,
you have fed us with the bread of life and the cup of blessing.
In the presence of Jesus you have shown us our own divinity
and made our humanity whole.

When we doubt our worth or splendour,
we remember your holy work, accomplished in the life of Jesus,
emerging through the darkness of the womb,
forgiving and healing and challenging through day and night,
resting in the gloom of the tomb,
emerging into resurrected life in the light of a new morning.

(All)

**We choose to go by the powers of love and justice
from this moment onward.**

Amen.

HYMN: "Live Into Hope" (VU 699)

1 Live into hope of captives freed,

of sight regained, the end of greed.
The oppressed shall be the first to see
the year of God's own jubilee!

- 2 Live into hope the blind shall see
with insight and with clarity,
removing shades of pride and fear,
a vision of our God brought near.
- 3 Live into hope of liberty,
the right to speak, the right to be,
the right to have one's daily bread,
to hear God's word and thus be fed.
- 4 Live into hope of captives freed
from chains of fear or want or greed.
God now proclaims our full release
to faith and hope and joy and peace.

AFFIRMATION OF HOPE

(One/All)

While we were still stardust,
our Creator held us in contemplation.

While we were enslaved,
the Compassionate One walked with us.

When we were set free,
the Shepherd guided us toward green pastures.

While we were violent and hateful,
God imagined a world of peace.

When we oppressed others,
the Mighty One moved against us and laid us low.

When we were oppressed,
the Deliverer broke our chains.

When we did not know the way of love and justice,

the Loving Parent sent the Child, Jesus.

When we carried heavy burdens,

Jesus bore them for us.

We have seen God's faithfulness in the past.

And because of our past, we have hope for the future.

SENDING & BLESSING

(Leader)

Go forth into the world

living into the hope of our faith,

bringing illuminating light to the lost

and sheltered darkness to the weary.

And as you go, receive this blessing:

May you find hope in the sunrise and comfort in the sunset.

May you remember the hope of Christ lives in you. Amen.

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

SUNG RESPONSE

In this season filled with expectation

We await the holy child;

God who comes to dwell among us

Bringing hope to earth beguiled.

As God's people, may we go

To the world, our hope to show.

(Tune: VU 62)

POSTLUDE