

GATHERING

Advent Candle Lighting—1st & 2nd Candles

Gathering (Advent Candle Lighting) Hymn—

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (verses 1 & 4) ELW 257

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

4. O come, O Branch of Jesse, free your own from Satan's tyranny; from depths of hell your people save, and give them vict'ry o'er the grave. *Refrain*

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Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, whose forgiveness is sure and whose steadfast love endures forever. **Amen.**

Together let us honestly and humbly confess that we have not lived as God desires.

(Silence is kept for reflection.)

Loving and forgiving God, **we confess that we are held captive by sin. In spite of our best efforts, we have gone astray. We have not welcomed the stranger; we have not loved our neighbor; we have not been Christ to one another. Restore us, O God. Wake us up and turn us from our sin. Renew us each day in the light of Christ. Amen.**

People of God, hear this glad news: by God's endless grace your sins are forgiven, and you are free—free from all that holds you back and free to live in the peaceable realm of God. May you be strengthened in God's love, † comforted by Christ's peace, and accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray...**Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming strengthen us to serve you with purified lives; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

WORD First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

¹Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

³A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴Every 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. ⁵Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass.

⁸The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

⁹Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"



First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11 (CONTINUED)

¹⁰See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

¹¹He 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. The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm: Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 (Read Responsively)

¹You have been gracious to your land, O LORD; you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.

²**You have forgiven the iniquity of your people and blotted out all their sins.**

⁸I will listen to what the LORD God is saying; for you speak peace to your faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to you.

⁹**Truly, your salvation is very near to those who fear you, that your glory may dwell in our land.**

¹⁰Steadfast love and faithfulness have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

¹¹**Faithfulness shall spring up from the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.**

¹²The LORD will indeed grant prosperity, and our land will yield its increase.

¹³**Righteousness shall go before the LORD and shall prepare for God a pathway.**

Second Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-15a

⁸Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

¹¹Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹²waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ^{15a}and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

The holy gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

¹The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; ³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,' "

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon PRINTED ON LAST PAGE OR PROVIDED LATER

Hymn of the Day “On Jordan’s Stormy Bank I Stand” ELW 437

1. On Jordan's stormy bank I stand, and cast a wishful eye to Canaan's fair and happy land, where my possessions lie.

Refrain: I am bound for the promised land, I am bound for the promised land; oh, who will come and go with me? I am bound for the promised land.

2. All o'er those wide extended plains shines one eternal day; there God the Son forever reigns and scatters night away. *Refrain*

3. No chilling winds or pois'nous breath can reach that healthful shore; sickness and sorrow, pain and death, are felt and feared no more. *Refrain*

4. When shall I reach that happy place and be forever blest? When shall I see my Savior's face and in God's bosom rest? *Refrain*

Text: Samuel Stennett, 1727-1795 Public Domain

Nicene Creed

Let us confess our faith in the words of the Creed.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

L: God of power and might, tear open the heavens and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need. *(A brief silence.)*

L: Faithful God, you teach us to wait for you with faithfulness and patience. Sustain and support us in our doubts and questions. Nurture our faith as we discern and enact your mission. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

#1. Loving God, you set the stars in the sky and breathe life into the earth. Renew the face of creation where it is in need of your healing touch. Mend the wounds of environmental damage and restore balance to ecosystems so that all creation can declare your praise. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

#2. Steadfast God, you never tire of seeking justice. Where people suffer from discrimination, judgment, and injustice, speak words of truth and comfort. Lead us toward a world where faithfulness will sprout underfoot and righteousness rain down from above. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

#3. Leading God, you ask us to make uneven ground smooth. Make even the disparities between your people. Sustain and support people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Accompany disability advocates who work for a world accessible to all. Teach us to celebrate the great diversity in our midst. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

#4. Watch over all of Northwoods STaR Ministries, and guide each of us to bless our communities and churches. May this be our gift to you, Lord Jesus. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**



Prayers of Intercession (CONTINUED)

L: Tender God, you know sorrow and joy alike. We pray for those in our families and congregations who are not joyful in this holiday season. Comfort those who grieve, be a companion to all who are lonely, tend those who are sick or struggling with depression, and gather all people in your healing embrace. We pray for all those on the prayer list — Norris & Marion, Pat S., Kathy, Pat H., James & Debbie, Dorothy, Mary, Phil & Janice, _____ and all those we name before you now, out loud or in our hearts. *(pause)* Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.** *(Other prayers added here)*

L: Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THANKSGIVING

Offering (The offering plates are near the sanctuary entrance. Please place your offering there as you depart. Thank you for your faithful support.)

Offering prayer

Let us pray...**Generous God, you have created all that is, and you provide for us in every season. Bless all that we offer, that through these gifts the world will receive your blessing. In the name of Jesus, Emmanuel, we pray. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

SENDING—Announcements

Blessing

The Creator of the stars bless your Advent waiting, the long-expected Savior fill you with love, the unexpected Spirit guide your journey, ✠ now and forever. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn "He Came Down" ELW 253

1. He came down that we may have love; he came down that we may have love; he came down that we may have love; hallelujah forevermore.

2. He came down that we may have light; he came down that we may have light; he came down that we may have light; hallelujah forevermore.

3. He came down that we may have peace; he came down that we may have peace; he came down that we may have peace; hallelujah forevermore.

4. He came down that we may have joy; he came down that we may have joy; he came down that we may have joy; hallelujah forevermore.

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Mission Statements

Northwoods STaR Ministries *"United in Christ, Sharing God's Love"*

Zion Brantwood *"We are disciples of Christ: Growing in faith, sharing our faith stories, serving others."*

First Prentice *"We are Jesus' disciples: Welcoming every sinner, sharing Jesus' love and teachings, encouraging all to live Christ-centered lives."*

First Ogema *"We are called and gathered to share Christ as we minister to all, bringing an unchanging God to a changing world."*

First Westboro *"Feeding bodies, minds and spirits through Christ."*

Dismissal

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SERMON Sermon for December 6, 2020 ~ Pastor Steve Weston

Advent is a season of preparation. The word, advent, means coming or arrival. On Christmas, we celebrate the arrival of Jesus Christ in the world the first time as the Babe of Bethlehem. As we prepare for our celebration of that first Advent, we are to remember also that our lives are to be lived in preparation for the final Advent, when Christ will come in glory at the end of everything to finally establish the Kingdom of God and make everything right.

So, what are you doing to get ready for Christmas? What's on your to-do list? Buying presents? Wrapping presents? Mailing presents? Baking? Decorating? Sending Christmas cards? In normal years, we might be getting the house ready for visitors, or packing for a trip to visit loved ones, but this year, maybe not.

How far down your list of things to do is . . . Repent? What? It's not on your list? When John the Baptist was sent to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Repentance and forgiveness are at the core of living out our Christian faith.

When Jesus arrived on earth, lots of Jewish folks were looking forward to the coming of a Messiah, and many pondered the question of what they might do to speed up the process. The Pharisees, in particular, thought that the Messiah would come when the people deserved it or were worthy of it. Some said that the Messiah would come if only all Jews would correctly keep two Sabbaths in a row, or if they met some other standard of obedience to the Law of Moses. (That's why the Pharisees were so persnickety about other people keeping the law. When they rebuked others for, say, working on the Sabbath, they were saying, "You're preventing the Messiah from coming!")

John the Baptist came with a slightly different message: The Messiah is coming, ready or not, so you'd best get ready. Repent and be baptized, he proclaimed, to make oneself worthy when the Messiah comes. Repentance is the key to being ready. And when Jesus did arrive on the scene, the first thing he did was to proclaim, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

After Jesus, we can see that the truth was deeper than John's message of being ready and worthy. The Messiah came to save us from our sins, precisely because we could never deserve it or be worthy of it. We are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God. If God doesn't save us, we're not going to get saved. There is no earning or deserving of God's love and mercy. It's all a gift. Being a Christian is nothing to boast about. To be a faithful Christian, you first have to recognize that there's something wrong with you that needs fixing; otherwise, there would be no reason for Jesus to die for your sins.

Because of that, repentance and forgiveness are key to living a Christian life. First, there is our need to repent for ourselves, to recognize our faults, failings and shortcomings and seek God's mercy. Forgiveness is given unconditionally, but it is impossible to receive it without an awareness that there's something to forgive. Part of repentance is asking God to make us aware of what faults need forgiving, so that we can turn away from them or change our minds about sinful attitudes.

Second, we need to be forgiving of one another. How can I expect God to be merciful to me, if I'm not merciful toward others? And yet, that's often not how people behave. Some folks seem to get their kicks out of highlighting other people's mistakes and failures. They'll ask "gotcha" questions in order to make themselves seem superior. They seem to love complaining, perhaps to distract themselves from their own faults, so they go looking for stuff to complain about. This is not a Christian attitude. We should be as eager to forgive others as we are to be forgiven.

Third, and this is something more subtle, repentance and forgiveness is something we do on behalf of the world. When go through our formal confession and forgiveness as part of our worship services, we always say "we," not "I," That's because we're confessing not only for ourselves, but for everyone else as well. There's a lot wrong with the world, don't you agree? When we confess in worship, we might mention a few sins that I myself, or you yourself, are not personally guilty of, but we confess that the humanity family we are a part of is guilty of such sins. So, on behalf of the all humanity, we Christians

confess humankind's sinfulness and pray that all might come to receive God's forgiveness.

John was right that repentance should be on the list of things to do in preparing for the coming of the Messiah. And if indeed, "Jesus is the reason for the season," maybe it should be on our getting-ready-for-Christmas to-do list. Because Jesus did come. He was born as one of us, lived as one of us, died as one of us, for the forgiveness of our sins, and rose to open the gates to eternal life. Thanks be to God!