**ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH, WOODLAND, MI**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 20, 2020**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS & PRELUDE**

**Lighting of the advent wreath**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent: Love**

Last Sunday we lit the candle of Hope, remembering the hope which comes in Christ, the candle of Peace, remembering God’s dream of a peaceful world, and the candle of Joy, remembering the Spirit within us who brings joy. Today we light the fourth candle of Advent, the candle of Love.

Scripture tells us “There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18). God created this world in love and this world will end in the love of God. God’s love pervades all aspects of this life. From birth to death, pain to delight, strangers to lovers, God’s love is there. We light this candle in Love.

**On this day, we remember God is Love.**

**Gathering**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**Confession and Forgiveness**

In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another. Most merciful God,

**we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.** **Amen.**

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

**Gathering Song“O Come, O Come Emmanuel” ELW 257**



**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 together.

**Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.** **Amen.**

**First Reading**    **2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16**

A reading from 2 Samuel.

  1Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” 3Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.”
  4But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: 5Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 6I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. 7Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” 8Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; 9and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. 16Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm Luke 1:46b-55**

 46bMy soul proclaims the greatness | of the Lord,
  47my spirit rejoices in | God my Savior,
 48**for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your | lowly servant.**
  **From this day all generations will | call me blessed:**
 49you, the Almighty, have done great | things for me
  and holy | is your name.
 50**You have mercy on | those who fear you,**
  **from generation to | generation.** R
 51You have shown strength | with your arm
  and scattered the proud in | their conceit,
 52**casting down the mighty | from their thrones**
  **and lifting | up the lowly.**
 53You have filled the hungry | with good things
  and sent the rich | away empty.
 54**You have come to the aid of your | servant Israel,**
  **to remember the prom- | ise of mercy,**
 55the promise made | to our forbears,
  to Abraham and his chil- | dren forever.

**Second Reading**  **Romans 16:25-27**

A reading from Romans.

25Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—27to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Gospel Acclamation**

**Alleluia, Lord, to whom shall we go?**

**Alleluia. You have the words of eternal life.**

**Alleluia, alleluia.**

**Gospel** **Luke 1:26-38**

The holy gospel according to Luke.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

26In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” 29But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” 34Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” 35The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

**SERMON Pastor Becky Ebb Speese Mary, What Did You Know?**

 Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

 Imagine being a young woman, a teenager, perhaps, living in a simple family, in a small town with nothing very interesting going on in your life? I grew up in a small, insignificant kind of town in the middle of Iowa, surrounded by corn fields and bean fields, cow farms and pig farms. Not unlike growing up around here. It was a simple life growing up in a family of modest income, in a very small high school, with the biggest excitement was being able to drive to a larger town to go to a mall or a McDonald’s. But it was a good life. I had a great church and youth group to be a part of. Bible camp was the highlight of my high school summers, to get me out of de-tasseling corn or walking beans for a few weeks. My family, church and the Bible Camp instilled in me a strong faith. I hope that many of you, current teens and adults, know this experience as we live in another small town, also surrounded by farms and many of you grew up here or in similar places.

 It was in this context where I first heard God call me into ministry. First as a very young child, and later as a teen. In those days, when I would talk about this call to ministry, I was told NO by my parents, by my pastors, by others in my faith community. I was a girl. God did not call girls to be pastors. My mother even gave me the advice to marry a pastor instead. I attended a Lutheran College with that in mind along with getting a degree. I had decided to become a youth minister instead.

However, God had, in fact, called me to be a pastor. In spite of all of the NO’s in my life, I kept hearing God’s YES! And what joyful news I heard when I got to that Lutheran college, that, in fact, women were now being ordained in both the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church 50 years ago this year! I finally heard the YES from God, outside of my own head. But the NO’s were still strong in my mind and I struggled with this call for a number of years, until I got to seminary, where I started out in a program to be a youth minister. But 36 years ago this past week, I was ordained as a pastor in the Lutheran Church. God’s YES, was stronger than the NO’s that still were being told to me.

 Let’s go back about 2000 years to another small town- in Israel. A young woman, who tradition tells us was likely a teen, was living a quiet life in Nazareth. She was from a poor to modest income family, anticipating her upcoming marriage to Joseph.

There is no way that I am comparing my experience of being called by God to the call that Mary experienced because her calling was huge! God called her to be the mother of His Son!

 The comparison is only in terms of being simple teens, living in simple homes, in small towns being called by God.

 Can you imagine being this young woman, going about her day, and having an angel appear to her out of nowhere? She must have been at the most startled, if not frightened. Having an angel visitation could be a very frightening and highly unusual experience. He calls her attention by saying “Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you.” We are told she was perplexed by these words. I think that she must have been beyond perplexed. She would likely have been a bit frightened to say the least. Gabriel must have realized this because his next words are “do not be afraid for you have found favor with God.”

 We might wonder along with Mary, why was she favored by God? Did she have an extra special amount of faith? Was she an unusually special person? We don’t know. We know very little about her or why God chose her. Perhaps God knew that she would be receptive to the call that was being given to her. For it was a most unusual and challenging call, to say the least.

 Mary is told that God has chosen her to be the mother of his Son! Now Mary most likely knew how babies were born and she knew that it would be impossible for her to be pregnant even though she was engaged to Joseph, we are told that she was a virgin. So she asks the obvious question, how can this be?

 She doesn’t get a very clear answer, other than the Holy Spirit would make it happen.

 We are not told how long it took Mary to think about this. In Luke’s story, its appears as though she did not take much time to think at all but its certainly possible that she had to really think about this calling.

 To have to tell her parents and Joseph that she was pregnant with God’s son would have been a daunting though. Were they actually going to believe her? What kind of story is this? She knew that she would have faced the ruin of her reputation in the community. She may have been a huge disappointment to her family. And Joseph, what about Joseph? Most likely he would have broken off their engagement. And in Matthew’s account of this story, he almost did, until the angel intervened in his life as well.

 This would certainly not be an easy call. I cannot imagine Mary feeling very favored at first. And she must have wondered, why me?

 In the end, Mary does believe that God has called her. She hears God’s YES even in the midst of the many NO’s that she is likely going to hear. Perhaps it was in hearing that her cousin, Elizabeth, who was beyond childbearing years, was also pregnant with John the Baptist and in hearing the words, nothing shall be impossible with God, were the words Mary needed to hear. If Mary was to say yes to this special calling, to me the mother of God’s Son, then God would be in the details and things would work out.

 Mary finally responds with words of acceptance and faith, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

And we know the rest of the story.

 Let’s now pair the story of what is known as the annunciation with the song of Mary, called the Magnificat, which was our Psalmody today.

 There is a popular Christmas song entitled, Mary Did you Know? The words of this song wonder how much did Mary know about who this baby, God’s son, would turn out to be and what his life would be like?

 In the Magnificat, we hear that Mary does have some understanding about what this baby will grow up to do. She sees that through this baby, God is at work in the world, a world that in her time needed to be turned upside down, in a world that we live in today that also needs to be turned upside down. The Magnificat is a rallying cry for those who are downtrodden and in need of hope. This is certainly true for us and our world in many ways right now. It is a song of hope for those whose lives are hurting, especially due to injustice and at the same time a song of threat for those in positions of abusive power. God is in the business of turning the world upside down through the life and ministry of his Son.

 I found these lyrics by Jennifer Henry that go with the tune of Mary Did you Know to speak to us about the Magnificat.

Mary did you know,

that your ancient words

would still leap off our pages?

Mary did you know,

that your spirit song

would echo through the ages?

Did you know that your holy cry would be subversive word,

that the tyrants would be trembling when they know your truth is heard?

Mary did you know,

that your lullaby

would stir your own Child’s passion?

Mary did you know,

that your song inspires

the work of liberation?

Did you know that your Jubilee is hope within the heart of all who dream of justice, who yearn for it to start?

The truth will teach, the drum will sound, healing for the pain

The poor will rise, the rich will fall. Hope will live again.

Mary did you know,

that we hear your voice

for the healing of the nations?

Mary did you know,

your unsettling cry

can help renew creation?

Do you know, that we need your faith,

the confidence of you,

May the God that you believe in,

be so true.

 We celebrate Mary today because she said yes to God even though she knew what was coming. Dr. Karoline Lewis says this about Mary. “Mary models the kind of reaction we should have to the divinity’s disturbance in our lives. She wonders and she ponders. She questions and she considers. She answers in awe. And Mary’s reply to God’s call understands that fear is characteristic of our response to God when God disrupts our lives.”

 We are all called by God in some way. God’s calling to us into ministry is not limited to being pastors. This calling can happen in all areas of life, as we live out of faith, even when its not convenient or even safe. Living and speaking God’s message of justice in a world that can be very unjust brings challenges to lives that we would like to live peacefully and quietly. But those who are hurting, who are victims of injustice, who are feeling unloved in a cold world, need to have God’s people ready to answer calls to service and reach out with the love of Christ wherever God puts us. We do not have to come from big places or important families. Many people whom God has used throughout history had humble beginnings. God calls us wherever God finds us. When God calls us, may we like Mary respond, count me in, I want to be a servant of God to bring light and love in a dark world!

Say YES to God’s YES and Amen!

**Hymn of the Day “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You” ELW 248**



**cREED**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,**

**creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,**

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**

**born of the virgin Mary,**

**suffered under Pontius Pilate,**

**was crucified, died, and was buried;**

**he descended to the dead.\***

**On the third day he rose again;**

**he ascended into heaven,**

**he is seated at the right hand of the Father,**

**and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,**

**the holy catholic church,**

**the communion of saints,**

**the forgiveness of sins,**

**the resurrection of the body,**

**and the life everlasting. Amen.**

\*Or, “he descended into hell,” another translation of this text in widespread use.

**Prayers of Intercession**

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.*

Gracious God, all generations call you blessed. In this holy season we pray for our neighbors of other denominations and faiths. Inspire the faith of their people. Cultivate understanding among us and strengthen us in love and service to our community. We pray especially for Sudanese Christ Lutheran Church. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Creator God, you scatter the proud. Everything we have belongs first to you. Bless and protect the seas, mountains, plains, forests, skies, and soils that surround us. Give us humility as we tend them. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Righteous God, you humble the powerful and lift up the lowly. We pray for the leaders of all nations, that they amplify the voices of people in need. Guide all people entrusted with leadership, to create societies in which everyone can flourish. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Compassionate God, you fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty. Nourish those who lack access to adequate food and nutrition. Bless the work of advocates, community organizers, and food pantries. Encourage others to provide for their neighbors in need. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Healing God, you pour out mercy to all who cry out to you. Surround everyone in need of healing in body, mind, or spirit with your tender presence. We pray especially for the family of Carol Morgan, Clarence Battice and his siblings, Caroline Brecheisen, Brenda Bite, the family of Mark Willard, the Krikke family, Garrett Smith, Joyce Heise, Shelly, the family of Betty Hynes, Dana Traub, Laura Lynch-Halliburton, Lisa Hetchler, Terry Speese, Janine Kaufman, Brian Smith, Cort Zylstra, Jerry Southgate, Vi Aho, and Chris and Charles Farlee. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, you are faithful to the promises you made to our forebears. We give thanks for the ministry of Katharina von Bora Luther and other ancestors who organized, planned, dreamed, encouraged, and reached out as they served you. We give thanks for the bold leadership of female leaders in our own time. Inspire others with their steadfast witness. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

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

**Peace**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**Offering & Offering Prayer**

Let us pray. God our provider, you have not fed us with bread alone, but with words of grace and life. Bless us and these your gifts, which we receive from your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**Thanksgiving at the Table**

In the night in which he was betrayed,

our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;

broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,

and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood,

shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

**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.**

**COMMUNION**

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is given and shed for you. You may receive your communion elements.

**Sending**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**Blessing**

The God of steadfastness and encouragement

grant you to live in harmony with one another,

in accordance with Christ Jesus.

**Amen.**

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,

so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

The God of all grace ☩ bless you now and forever.

**Amen.**

**Sending SonG “Soon and Very Soon” ELW 439**



**Dismissal**

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

**Thanks be to God.**

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**THANK YOU TO ALL WHO SERVED TODAY:**

**Presider: Rebecca Ebb-Speese**

**Musician: Martha Yoder**

**Elder: Dan Utterback**

**Trustee: Claude Smith**

**Offering counters: Mary Makley and Martha Yoder**

**PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL**

With thanks for all God’s blessings and his love for all people. Our Bishops, Craig Satterlee Elizabeth Eaton, and the congregations of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod. **Sudanese Christ Lutheran Church in Wyoming**

Prayers for our friends, especially for the family of Carol Morgan, Clarence Battice and his siblings, Caroline Brecheisen, Brenda Bite, the family of Mark Willard, the Krikke family, Garrett Smith, Joyce Heise, Shelly, the family of Betty Hynes, Dana Traub, Laura Lynch-Halliburton, Lisa Hetchler, Terry Speese, Janine Kaufman, Brian Smith, Cort Zylstra, Jerry Southgate, Vi Aho, and Chris and Charles Farlee.

All those members of Zion’s family traveling; all those homebound or in frail health; all those suffering with quiet, unknown needs or worries.

For those who serve on our behalf: public safety, utility workers, medical personnel, military personnel. For those who might be forgotten.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

* + **Tara is out of the office next week since no bulletins are needed. The following week, the deadline for bulletin and newsletter will be Tuesday evening, December 29.**
	+ Council voted to suspend in-person services until the positivity rate drops to 3%. People may to listen to the service in the parking and the service will be streamed.
	+ Christmas Eve Service will be in parking lot at 6:00 PM. It will also be live streamed from the parking lot. It will be a simple service, but we will be able to sing our favorite carols in our cars! We will have communion and the traditional candlelight service.

To make this a festive night, the parking lot will be decorated! The goal is to have the church surrounded by luminaries. Today after church, there is an opportunity to assemble the luminaries. Jugs need to be cut, filled with sand and candles placed in them. If a small group can stay to help in a distanced way, that would be great!

* + **Address Changes Needed**.  If your address has changed since the directory was printed last year, we need your updated address to mail you an annual meeting packet. Please send updated addresses to Tara at office@zionwoodlandmi.org   The current plan is to mail all the material to members prior to the meeting.  Council is still working on details of how we will hold our annual meeting.  We anticipate it will use mail along with a virtual and drive-in meeting depending on weather.  Please call or email the office with your updated address information.  Thank you.
	+ Zion Sponsors Christmas Garland.  A donation was designated for Zion to sponsor a lamppost garland in Lake Odessa.  Zion’s garland is on the lamppost just north of the hardware store driveway.   The garland has a tag that says, “Joy to the World, Zion Lutheran Church, Woodland.”  If you have a chance, take a drive through town after dark to see how pretty the village looks with all the lights and decorations downtown.
	+ There will not be a service at the church on Sunday, December 27 as Pastor Becky will be on vacation. The synod is putting a YouTube video of lessons and carols and that link will be posted on Facebook and our website.
	+ Volunteers are needed for lay preachers on Jan. 24 and Feb 21. for Pastor Becky’s Sundays off
	+ The ZLCW wishes to thank everyone who gave donations for our Thankoffering service. We collected $610 and the funds have been sent to the Women of the ELCA for their many programs. If anyone wises to receive a tax donation receipt, please contact me at 269-367-9191 and I will mail you one. Other years, I have put them in the mailboxes at church. Thank you, Carol Engle, ZLCW Treasurer.
	+ Counters Needed. We are in need of a few more people to serve as volunteer counters for Sunday Offerings.  If you are willing to serve in this role, please let Martha or Karen know. Thank you.