

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH
December 18, 2022 – Fourth Sunday of Advent

Welcome to Worship

Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time at 7:00 p.m. Sunday.

Email sketchingalong4@gmail.com to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Opening Hymn: MV 120 *My Soul Cries Out*, vv. 1, 3, 4

1. My soul cries out with a joyful shout
that the God of my heart is great,
and my spirit sings of the wondrous things
that you bring to the ones who wait.
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight,
and my weakness you did not spurn,
so from east to west shall my name be blest.
Could the world be about to turn?

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
and the world is about to turn.

3. From the halls of power to the fortress tower,
not a stone will be left on stone.
Let the king beware for your justice tears
ev'ry tyrant from his throne.
The hungry poor shall weep no more,
for the food they can never earn;
there are table spread, ev'ry mouth be fed,
for the world is about to turn.

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
and the world is about to turn.

4. Though the nations rage from age to age,
we remember who holds us fast:
God's mercy must deliver us
from the conqueror's crushing grasp.
This saving word that our forebears heard
is the promise which holds us bound,
'til the spear and rod can be crushed by God,
who is turning the world around.

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
and the world is about to turn.

Inviting Holy Light

Will you join me in preparing for worship. Starting by connecting with our bodies, noticing how we are feeling, a week away from Christmas.

How are you feeling this morning? Stressed, or relaxed.

Where do you feel the stress most? Your shoulders, your neck, your stomach. Notice the muscles there, and breathe.... Breathe deeply, and slowly.

Breathe in and notice how you feel. Breathe out and remember how loved you are.

With this one light, we pray: O God, we place this light in this holy space as a reminder that we are on this journey together. Be light along all our paths. Lead us to a more just world and help us to stay awake and present to your love in each ordinary day. Amen.

[lights candle]

Sung Response: MV 220 Love Shines as the Solitary Star

Love shines as the solitary star.

Faith is the inner light.

You and I together mirror the Light of Lights,
and illumine the pathway home.

Nurturing Safe Space

We believe that all people are children of God; that persons of all ages, races, abilities, theologies, gender identities, and sexual orientations are part of our increasingly diverse culture; and we include all persons into the full life and ministry of the church.

I'm borrowing from the Affirming Ministry Statement of our Regional Council here, saying: that God's love is wider and more inclusive than we can imagine, let alone live out, and we commit ourselves to sharing that news with others who may have heard a quite different message about what it means to be church. Because voices of condemnation, exclusion, and hatred are loud and persistent within the church and in society, ... it is important to be a public witness and to be a role model for other ministries. We at St. Andrew's will work persistently, encouraging one another to, as a community, be safe, accessible, inclusive, and affirming.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

We acknowledge that we at St. Andrew's live, work, worship, and play on traditional territory both of Wahnapiatae First Nation and of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek. The Robinson Huron Treaty was made between First Nations and the Settlers who came from Europe to this land. Our United Church historically participated in a system causing harm to Indigenous communities, but the work to heal has begun.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus once again, we remember everything this birth means for our whole world and all people: hope, peace, joy, and love. May we live our lives moving gently in creation, listening, learning, and striving to be people of reconciliation.

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to St. Andrew's! As of Dec. 13, 602 pairs of socks were donated to Socks for Souls. We also received \$150 in donations to purchase more socks. Thank you very much for your generosity! Socks were distributed this week to Lansdowne and Queen Elizabeth Public Schools, Sudbury Action Centre for Youth, Sudbury Secondary School Value Vault, and others in need in the downtown area. On December 13, Bev Harris-Cecutti and her husband Albert delivered your generous donations to Lansdowne and Queen Elizabeth Public Schools. Again, thank you so much! More details were in the NEWS. Also, there will be two in-sanctuary Christmas Eve services, the family service at 5:00 and the candle-light service at 9:00.

Those at home, if you are new here, note that our contact information is at the end of the video, and you might want to visit our website or Facebook page, or email our office manager so you can receive our weekly e-newsletter called the NEWS. We also have a Social Hour on Zoom, every Sunday night at 7. As always, you can get your Zoom link to join that time of connection by sending an email to Diane. That email address is above.

Call to Worship (Tracey, Sophia, and Benjamin Le Grand)

Advent Candle Lighting Ceremony

Tracey: Over a hundred people, from the ages of two to eighty years old, were asked the question, “What makes you feel connected; what makes you feel loved?” From the voices of different generations, hear their answers:

Sophia: Singing Christmas Hymns. Being invited in. Home-cooked food. An inside joke.

Benjamin: Playing with friends at school. Hugs. Watching Christmas movies with my family. Big laughs.

Tracey: Surprise phone calls. Making music with other people. Dinner parties. Dancing with my partner (or the love of my life?).

Sophia: Today we light the candle of love as a reminder that from the very first generation, God has surrounded us with love. May this good news—these threads of love—not only weave deeper connections between neighbors, but shape our actions and allow us to see God more clearly.

Benjamin lights the candle

Sophia: In a lonely world, let this light shine bright. From generation to generation, we are held in God’s love. Thanks be to God for that good news. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Amazing, embodied God, whose spirit rested upon Joseph, we praise and adore you. Word in flesh, Emmanuel, always you are with us. Prepare us for the birth of something holy and new. We pray this along with a modern version of the Prayer Jesus taught...

The Prayer Jesus Taught

Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother, Holy and blessed is your true name. We pray for your reign of peace to come, We pray that your good will be done, Let heaven and earth become one. Give us this day the bread we need, Give it to those who have none. Let forgiveness flow like a river between us, From each one to each one. Lead us to holy innocence Beyond the evil of our days — Come swiftly Mother, Father, come. For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy: Forever your name is All in One.

Hymn: VU 43 *Go, Tell it on the Mountain, vs. 1*

1. While shepherds kept their watching
o’er silent flocks by night,
behold, throughout the heavens
there shone a holy light.

Go, tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere.
Go, tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born.

Time up Front

A gift, but also a challenge as we try to do as Jesus taught, is to remember that we can’t do many things alone - we need one another. We need one another to grow. We need one another to love. But that is hard, when we think about things differently. We may argue. How do we love each other, and how do we not just quit and ignore the people we don’t agree with?

Prayer for Grace

Think about this - Mary was very young, God told her that she would be pregnant with a very special baby – she did not plan this. How do you think might have felt? Afraid? Do you know what she did? She went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth!

I invite you to touch your heart, feel it beating. God made you and me special. We can't deal with big things – good things and bad things – alone. We need people. Like Mary going to Elizabeth.

Think about a time when you did not ask for help, you really needed it, but you tried to deal with it yourself, and you worried and worried. Anyone give an example of a time when you didn't ask for help? How did it go?

Let us pray: God, help us not to be stubborn when we need help, when we need to listen to people who help us to make better choices. Forgive us for not listening to people who want to help us. Forgive us for times when we don't ask questions when we don't know what to do. Help us to talk to you, God, praying and listening.

Silent Moment

Words of Assurance

Friends, this is what I know—

God delights in us.

God throws open the door, just like Elizabeth, and says, "Come on home. There is room for you here!"

And in that moment, we are blessed.

In that moment, we are forgiven.

In that moment, we are seen, healed, and welcomed home.

So rest in this good news: you are saved by grace.

Hymn: VU 43 Go, Tell it on the Mountain, vs. 3

3. Down in a lowly manger
the humble Christ was born,
and God sent our salvation
that blessed Christmas morn.

Go, tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere.

Go, tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born.

Scripture Readings (Genevieve Gibbons)

Luke 1:39-45, 56-58 – Common English Bible

This week we return to Mary's experience. After receiving the news from the angel, she retreats to her cousin Elizabeth's house. When Mary arrives (perhaps unannounced), Elizabeth doesn't just welcome her—she is filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks a blessing upon Mary as her own child leaps and kicks within her womb.

Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. She entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. With a loud voice she blurted out,

"God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months, and then returned to her home.

When the time came for Elizabeth to have her child, she gave birth to a boy. Her neighbours and relatives celebrated with her because they had heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy.

Luke 1:46-55 – Common English Bible

In this moment of profound solidarity, Mary and Elizabeth see the divine in one another. This connection inspires Mary to sing her radical hymn of praise, declaring how God's liberating love remains steadfast throughout the ages.

Mary said,

“With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.

God 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.

Holy is God's name;

showing mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next,
who honors God.

God has shown strength;

scattering those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

pulling the powerful down from their thrones

and lifted up the lowly.

God has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty-handed... just as God promised.”

Let us pray: God of all, we are a mixed bag of distracted and forlorn, eager and anxious.

We hope that you will move through the obstacle course we build up around our hearts— made out of questions and defenses—and wash us in your good news. Knock on our door, calm the guard dog we have placed in front of our vulnerable hearts, come right in. Come, Spirit, Come. Make yourself at home. Pull us close and tell us your story of unbelievable good news. We are listening, and, we are grateful. Amen.

Message: *Lean in*

The Message will be posted on the website when it is available.

Hymn: VU 73 *The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy*

1. The virgin Mary had a baby boy,
the virgin Mary had a baby boy,
the virgin Mary had a baby boy,
and they say that his name is Jesus.

He come from the glory, (*clap, clap*)

he come from the glorious kingdom.

He come from the glory, (*clap, clap*)

he come from the glorious kingdom.

Oh, yes! believer! Oh, yes! believer!

He come from the glory, (*clap, clap*)

he come from the glorious kingdom.

2. The angels sang when the baby was born,

the angels sang when the baby was born,

the angels sang when the baby was born,

and they say that his name is Jesus.

He come from the glory, (*clap, clap*)

he come from the glorious kingdom.

He come from the glory, (*clap, clap*)

he come from the glorious kingdom.

Oh, yes! believer! Oh, yes! believer!
He come from the glory, (*clap, clap*)
he come from the glorious kingdom.

3. The shepherds came where the baby was born,
the shepherds came where the baby was born,
the shepherds came where the baby was born,
and they say that his name is Jesus.

He come from the glory, (*clap, clap*)
he come from the glorious kingdom.
He come from the glory, (*clap, clap*)
he come from the glorious kingdom.
Oh, yes! believer! Oh, yes! believer!
He come from the glory, (*clap, clap*)
he come from the glorious kingdom.

Offering Moment

In our offerings to God, we provide ways for St. Andrew's to serve God and sing Mary's song to the world. When we combine what we offer God, our gifts serve Christ in ways we could not alone. Thank you for all you do, offering your self – your time and talent – and for offering your treasures towards God's ministry locally at St. Andrew's United, and globally through Mission and Service. Let us worship God through our offerings now...

Dedication Hymn: VU 510 *We Have this Ministry, vs. 2*

2. O Christ, the tree of life, our end and our beginning,
we grow to fullest flower when rooted in your love.
Brothers, sisters, clergy, lay, called to service by your grace,
different cultures, different gifts, the young and old a place.
We have this ministry, O God, receive our giving.

Dedication Prayer

God of plenty, like a great mother, you fill our lives with love, connection, and ultimate care.

(Hands on hearts) As we put our hands on our hearts we thank you for our many blessings; safe places to live, enough food. For our giving us enough, thank you.

(Arms out, hands open) We hold open our arms and hands offering ourselves in love and dedication towards your work of building a kin-dom of love and justice.

We offer to you and your Dream for our world our money, our time, our talent and prayers and our very selves. Amen.

Prayers of Community

God of yesterday, God of tomorrow, thank you for the gift of relationships. From the beginning: you planted us within communities; you hard wired us for connection; you made our hearts capable of infinite love. Thank you! This gift of relationship has led us to people who lead us to you. So today, we want to say thank you for our Elizabeths—for the people who have thrown open the doors for us, and who revel in our joy. Thank you for those who point out your presence in our lives, and who are quick to affirm us and call us blessed. Those people come in many shapes and sizes.

For some of us, the Elizabeths in our lives are family members— parents and grandparents who have cheered us on along the way. For others of us, they have been teachers and coaches, neighbours and scout leaders, professors and counselors. Creator, how can we possibly forget the way our chosen family—friends and partners—have been like Elizabeth for us. These people have reminded us what love looks like in a hurting world, which has pointed us back to you.

So today, God, we ask you to help open our eyes even more, so we can see you—in those who love us well and in those who don't and whom we cannot seem to understand or empathize with. We want to see you in those whose coffee order we have memorized, and in those we've never talked to, but whom your spirit might nudge us to offer hospitality to. We want to see you, not only in those who are family—who look like us or think like us—but in those who come from very different places and positions in life.

From generation to generation, you have left your fingerprints all over creation. Thank you.

We now take a moment to hold prayerfully and lovingly people near and far, people in profound need of your presence today. Some are near and dear to us, some or strangers we see from afar, some of people whom we might even dislike, but you call us to reconciliation, so we pray for them too. We offer them quietly to you in this silent moment. (*silence*)

Help us to be like Elizabeth—to see and celebrate glimmers of your good news—in all walks of life. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 12 *She Walked in the Summer*

1. She walked in the summer through the heat on the hill.

She hurried as one who went with a will.

She danced in the sunlight when the day was done.

Her heart knew no evening who carried the sun.

2. Fresh as a flower at the first ray of dawn,
she came to her cousin whose morning was gone.

There leaped a little child in the ancient womb,
and there leaped a little hope in every ancient tomb.

3. Hail, little sister, who heralds the spring.

Hail, brave mother, of whom prophets will sing,

Hail to the moment beneath your breast.

May all generations call you blessed.

4. When you walk in the summer through the heat on the hill,

when you're wound with the wind and one with Her will,

be brave with the burden you are blessed to bear,

for it's Christ that you carry everywhere,

everywhere, everywhere.

Blessing

May each life make large the Spirit of God and may you know the fullness of God's favour resting upon each of you as you leave this place. For see, God is turning the world upside down; **the plans of the self righteous will come to an end and the way of vulnerability will lead to life.**

The Mighty One is doing good things in and through us.

May we go and give birth to the justice and love which has been planted within us by the Spirit of God.

Blessing Hymn: VU 7 *Hope is A Star, vs. 4*

4. Love is a flame that burns in our heart,

Jesus has come and will never depart.

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.

Postlude

Inviting Holy Light, Opening Prayer, Offering Moment (adapted), Dedication Prayer, and Blessing Prayer from *Seasons of the Spirit, Fusion*. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany 2022-2023, Year A. © 2022 Woodlake Books Inc.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory adapted from the Canadian Shield “Affirming Ministry Statement” and words written by Jessica Knoyle, Ottawa, ON. GatheringWorship.ca Advent, Christmas, Epiphany 2022/2023, Year A.

Call to Worship – Lighting the Advent Candle adapted from a prayer by Rev. Sarah Speed | sanctifiedart.org

Introduction to the Prayer of Grace, Prayer of Grace, and Words of Assurance by Rev. Sarah Speed | sanctifiedart.org

Scripture reading introductions from *Sanctified Art: From Generation to Generation Sermon Planning Guide* | 6, sanctifiedart.org

Luke 1:39-45; 56-58 and **Luke 1:45-55** from Common English Bible (CEB) © 2011 by Common English Bible.

Prayer after scripture adapted from *Sanctified Art*, Advent 4 Prayer of Illumination. sanctifiedart.org

The Prayer Jesus Taught by Parker J. Palmer, found in *Peace Prayers* by Carrie Leadingham, Joann E. Moschella, and Hilary M. Vartanian. ©1992 HarperSanFrancisco.

Prayers of Community adapted from a prayer written by Rev. Sarah Speed from *Sanctified Art Prayers of the People*, Advent 4. sanctifiedart.org

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