

2 Advent Leadership Letter – December 6, 2020

To our Zion Family,

This past week we entered the season of Advent. Some say this is the “most wonderful time of the year,” and Pastor Janet reminded us that, in the church year, Advent is a season of expectation and a season of waiting. My younger brother *loves* the season of Advent. He has already made his Christmas list, and each week he lets me know which candle I ought to be lighting on my non-existent home Advent wreath. This week: “Light one candle for hope.” Our faith community at Zion continues to bring me hope, and this week’s announcements contain some opportunities to share that hope within our community.

Announcements and updates:

-**This Sunday we will continue to utilize our remote worship practice**, offering the opportunity to attend the service via Zoom, livestreamed on Facebook, or by using the printed Service of the Word, which you will find later in this mailing.

-To join this Sunday’s service via Zoom, same log-in info as last week:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84354840714?pwd=TDJGTkwvSTBER2lNb1o1Qzd6WGxDdz09> Meeting ID: 843-5484 0714, Password: 022654. Or by PHONE, 6465588656, 84354840714#, 1#, 022654# US. If you would prefer to view the service via livestream on our YouTube channel, you can do so by visiting our page at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWzOtfCe2z7-bIPvxp621A>.

-The Red Cross has shared the results of the recent blood drive at Zion. They collected 10 units of blood, including one from a first-time donor, and report that 30 potential lives will be saved. Thanks to Cheryl Edmiston for sharing this information!

-As a reminder, the **Social Ministry Committee is continuing three Zion holiday traditions** this year, despite the pandemic limitations: providing **Food Baskets** for the Christmas holidays, the **Angel Tree** to benefit the Thea Bowman House, and the **Mitten Tree** to provide handmade and store bought hats, gloves, mittens, and scarves for the needy. This year, we are asking you to send financial contributions for the Food Baskets and Angel Tree project—please include these in your weekly/monthly offerings with an indication of the amount designated for these traditions. If you would prefer to provide gift cards for the Angel Tree project, we recommend they come from Walmart or Target. Mitten Tree donations, which will be given to residents of Johnson Park, can be dropped off in the designated bin in the downstairs coatroom. Food boxes are also located in the downstairs coatroom. Please respect social distancing as you drop off items in the coatroom. For those wishing to offer **food donations**, First Presbyterian in Utica is accepting donations from 9:30-11:00am on Tuesdays and Thursdays and will record donations for Zion. Thank you for your generosity directed toward those having an even more difficult time this year due to pandemic-related challenges.

-Even throughout this global pandemic, the ministry of Zion has continued and we seek to carry out Zion’s mission: *We are called and empowered by God’s love and the Risen Christ to joyfully welcome all, grow in faith, serve our community, and live in hope.* Your offerings support this work. Gloria has put together giving envelopes for 2021, and they are now available in the coatroom. Additionally, the Stewardship Committee requests that you return your 2021 pledge of time, talent, and treasure by Dec. 4th to let us know how you will support and assist us in doing God’s work here at Zion. Thank you, in advance, for your generosity!

-Local charities are continuing a tradition of collecting teddy bears for Christmas through the **Teddy Bear Toss**. Stuffed toys will be collected through Thursday at New York Sash from 8am-6pm and Friday at Babes from 8am-6pm.

(<http://www.uticateddybeartoss.com/>). Thanks to Ryan Kulawy for sharing this opportunity!

In her wonderful sermon this week, Pastor Janet gave our congregation some homework, echoing the advice from my brother. Of course, this came just as I was beginning to celebrate the close of my academic semester! But this is a good assignment, one rooted in this season of “waiting and watching and holding on to the hope.” She challenged us: “As you read the paper, listen to the news, as you go online and zoom and run the errands that still need doing, hunt for hope. Where do you see unexpected threads of grace, of goodness, of kindness, of people helping others? Cut out the article. Make a scrapbook of hope or a poster of hope. Let these days be a time to draw closer to God and be renewed with hope and love, joy and peace. In the midst of the violence of this world, the beginning of Advent invites us to hope for a different world. Advent invites us to live in hope, and not in despair, for our foundation rests on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ.” She encouraged us to wrap ourselves in stillness and hear a song of hope. Let’s be on the hunt for hope this week. I look forward to hearing what you find next Sunday!

Peace,

Kristen Burson and Mark Thompson, Church Council co-presidents

2 Advent



SERVICE OF THE WORD GATHERING

WELCOME

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the Holy Trinity, ☩ one God, the parent who rouses us from slumber, the shepherd who gathers us on the holy mountain, the deliverer who sets us free. **Amen.**

Let us come before the living God in confession. As we wait and watch for the promised day of salvation,

We open our hearts to you, O God. Search us and know us. Reveal all that we keep inside. To you, O God, we confess our sins, known and unknown. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us in your ways of justice and peace. Make us reflections of the radiant love of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Beloved children of the Most High, you are gathered before the righteous judge who has mercy on all. Splash exuberantly in the waters of baptism, where sin is washed away in the river of life. Dwell peacefully in the loving arms of the one who nurtures all creation. Go forth boldly in the assurance that our sins are forgiven in the name of the one who is coming and is already here, Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn *On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry #249, Verses 1 & 2* –Mary Senn

Vs. 1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh; awake and hearken, for he brings glad tidings of the King of kings!

Vs. 2 Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin; make straight the way for God within, and let us all our hearts prepare for Christ to come and enter there.

Prayer of the Day

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.**

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

ADVENT INVOCATION *-Fran LaGase*

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus to come into the world. His call to repentance challenged his listeners to consider their relationship with God. They were to repent of their sins and then so discipline their lives that they would be ready to receive him when he came.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 40:1-11

THE LIGHTING OF THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE

(Light two purple candles) *-Jim & Kim Marscher*

Today we relight the Candle of Expectation, reminding us of God's great promise that he would send a Messiah to save his people. As we light the Candle of Preparation, it reminds us that as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, so we also need to prepare ourselves for his coming into our lives.

THE HYMN: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel #257 (verse 2)

2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
embracing all things far and nigh:
in strength and beauty come and stay;
teach us your will and guide our way.

Refrain

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

THE PRAYER

-Fran LaGase

Blessed are you, O Lord of God, ruler of the universe. John the Baptist calls all people to prepare the Lord's way for the kingdom of heaven is near. Bless us as we light the candles on this wreath. Baptize us with the fire of your Spirit, that we may be a light shining in the darkness welcoming others as Christ has welcomed us, for he is our light and our salvation. Blessed be God forever. **Amen.**

LITANY FOR ADVENT

Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

And the redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgressions, says the Lord.

Let us pray. Glory be to You, Eternal God. Your glory shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together for your mouth, O Lord, has spoken it.

O come, O come, Immanuel.

Blessed are you, O God of the prophets. Behold you will come with a strong hand, and your arm shall rule for you.

Blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

You shall feed your flock like a shepherd; you shall gather the lambs with your arm, and carry them in your bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Blessed is he that comes; peace in heaven and glory in the highest.

SECOND READING: 2 Peter 3:8-15

GOSPEL: Mark 1:1-8

SERMON: *Good News from the Wilderness* -Rev. Jennifer DeWeerth

This morning I want to talk about the wilderness, a word, and image, that appears in both Isaiah and in the first verses of Mark's Gospel on this second Sunday of Advent. The wilderness signifies an inhospitable place, where people live on the edge of danger, uncertain of the provisions, precautions, and protections on which we normally rely.

The Biblical wilderness is where the people of Israel wandered for forty years. It's where they lived in the exile ~the spiritual wilderness of the Babylonian Captivity~ for seventy years. It's not what we think of when we think of wilderness. Biblical wilderness is not a rugged place of nature in which to enjoy a good hike. It's a place where you can get lost and where you don't know if you'll get out alive. It's a place with barely enough food, and possibly, not even enough water, to survive. It's harsh and austere and unpredictable, with none of the creature comforts. It's an edgy place outside the margins of well-being, and no one really chooses to go there. One writer says it like this: "The wilderness is a dangerous place; you only go there if you have to."

And yet, even though we never wanted to go there, the wilderness is a place that most all of us have been. Whether it comes to us in the guise of a hospital waiting room where four days seemed like forty, a thorny relationship, a troubled child, the loss of a spouse, a crippling panic attack, or the loneliness of being trapped without companionship in a global pandemic, the wilderness appears, unbidden and unwelcome, at our doorsteps. It insists on itself.

A few years ago, when I was preparing to preach some sermons on wilderness during Lent, I discovered a whole body of religious writing on wilderness that I didn't know existed: contemporary Jewish rabbis who write and teach about wilderness to their congregations. They call attention to the fact that three quarters of the Torah is the story of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. For these rabbis, wilderness is both a physical place and a metaphorical place. It is physical because the place is a desert, bleak and barren, and very dry. One contemporary rabbi who visited Mount Sinai says he felt jittery from being so far from anywhere, that he had a sense of utter loss of direction, with heat radiating from the sunburned ground. It seemed frightening even with an air-conditioned bus not far away.

And rabbis have a lot to say about wilderness metaphorically. For them, wilderness is not just the general setting for the stories in the Torah. Wilderness is the specific place where Torah, the holy law, is given by God. The law is not given in the walled city of Jerusalem as might be expected but, in the wilderness, ~ a place open and accessible to all.

Torah, these rabbis argue, is given in the wilderness to reinforce the timeless message that, even in a place of distress and panic and apprehension, the people somehow sense that God loves them, that God cares for them, and that they will make it to the Promised Land. We Christians could substitute "the gospel" for Torah here.

It is no coincidence that John appears “in the wilderness” following Mark’s quotation from Isaiah. “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness.” The Babylonian captivity and the Roman Empire are not so different from where Mark sits—both are the wilderness not-home of a people on the margins, yearning for God’s comfort and mercy but not finding it...yet. The most fascinating thing I learned from the Jewish rabbis is this: that generations of them have agreed that, in order to receive Torah, you must “make yourself a wilderness.” There seem to be about a dozen explanations for this strange saying. (It makes sense to say that someone goes into the wilderness, but how do you make yourself into a wilderness?) But all of them seem to boil down to the idea that receiving Torah, or for us, receiving Jesus, the good news of God’s nearing kingdom, is an attitude. You have to be willing to be released from your certainty and self-reliance or reliance on social status in order to take the good news into yourself, to put self-risk in your very heart and bones. In other words, you need to make yourself vulnerable. And at the same time, brave... and wild.

I have twice read a book by Brene Brown, the Oprah star and TED talk queen, called *Braving the Wilderness*. It’s a very good book, and I highly recommend it for many reasons. But what struck me the most reading it recently is that she says the same thing as the rabbis about *becoming the wilderness*. She says: “Belonging so fully to yourself that you’re willing to stand alone is a wilderness—an untamed, unpredictable place of solitude and searching...The special courage it takes to experience true belonging is not just about braving the wilderness, it’s about becoming the wilderness. It’s about breaking down the walls, abandoning our ideological bunkers, and loving from our wild heart rather than our weary hurt.”

Both the Rabbis and Brene Brown think that something about the experience of the wilderness leads to the identity, ever after, of having “become the wilderness.” And we see this in our scripture today. Forty chapters into a brutal prophesy of judgment, Isaiah announces that God’s comfort is nearly at hand for the people, that in the wilderness, a place from which presumably, nothing good can come, God, the gentle, caring shepherd God of the world, is being revealed.

And then John appears in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. Why in the wilderness? Because, in the wilderness, the illusion that we are self-sufficient, that the world is in our control, dissolves like a mirage, and we have no choice but to wait and watch as if our lives depend on God. When we are in that barren place of waiting, a bewildering and unfamiliar landscape, we are open to what God may be telling us and showing us. About our sin and our need. Our fragility and vulnerability. When we are wandering in the wilderness, and there is not enough justice or peace, not enough companionship and only just enough hope, we are on the lookout, watching the horizon of our lives for what God may be about to do.

At a certain point in our lives we have probably all been dragged or driven or pushed into a wilderness not of our choosing, a desolate place, a lonely harsh place of loss, grief, rejection, or extraordinary vulnerability. Everywhere we go after that in our lives, we carry that wilderness with us, within us. We carry that sense of solitude, even loneliness, and simultaneously, the surprising presence of God.

The wilderness is a difficult, inhospitable place where we do not want to live or even visit. But it turns out God is revealed there, the earliest glimmer and promise of the tender comfort and mercy of God, the beginning of the good news. Amen.

Apostles’ 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.

ANTHEM *I Wonder as I Wander* -arr. Mary Senn

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.

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.**

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.**

Tender God, you know sorrow and joy alike. We pray for those in our families and congregation 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. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Listen to the cries of your people waiting patiently for your healing hand and comforting Spirit especially: those who suffer with chronic pain and all cancer patients, Pr. Mary Etta, Gail, comfort for Norm, Rusty, Edween Ham, healing for Jim, healing for Elinor, Claudia and Fran, Edie Marie, Suzee, prayers for Michael Gilleece and family, Your Neighbors clients, Theresa, and our country, that the light of Christ may shine upon them with hope. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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

Thanksgiving at the Table

Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord, heaven and earth are full of your glory. In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son, who reached out to heal the sick and suffering, who preached good news to the poor, and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all. 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. Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and ascension, we await his coming in glory. Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord, and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food, the body and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all glory and honor, now and forever.

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Closing Hymn: *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light #815, Verses 1 & 3 -Mary Senn*

Vs. 1 I want to walk as a child of the light. I want to follow Jesus. God set the stars to give light to the world. The star of my life is Jesus. In him there is no darkness at all. The night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

Vs. 3 I'm looking for the coming of Christ. I want to be with Jesus. When we have run.... with patience the race, we shall know the joy of Jesus. In him there is no darkness at all. The night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

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.**

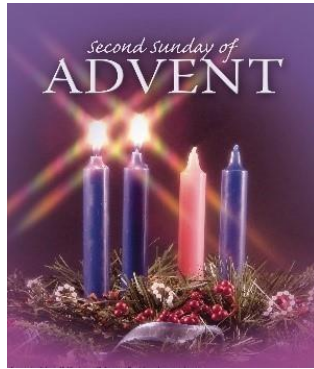
Dismissal

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

THE 2021 OFFERING ENVELOPES are available and are located in the downstairs coatroom.

Please call the office at 315.732.4110 ahead of time for pick-up. Any questions, call Gloria Cifonelli at 315.735.8077.

ANNUAL REPORT: Please submit your reports between now and January 4th. Thank you!!



The *Second Sunday of Advent*

...the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound... Isaiah 61:1

Who better to release us from the captivity to sin, O Lord? Who has heard the chains that bind us to our past, the sinful deeds we wish we could forget? You, Jesus, hear the clanking of the metal and know how to save us from every sin that weighs us down. We were prisoners to sin. No matter what we tried, we could not escape.

But you came to liberate us. You broke our chains. We are free! Amen.

Daily Prayers for Advent

Advent Booklets...

To help us prepare ourselves for the coming of the Savior, Zion's Social Ministry Committee ordered 50 copies of "Hope of Christmas Past, Present & Yet to Come: Daily Prayers for Advent."

You are welcome to stop by the church to select an Advent booklet from the display of devotional materials on the dresser by the front door. Please give Sara a call or leave a message at 315-732-4110 to let her know when you will be coming. You may also call or email Sara at office@zionluth.com to request that one be sent to you.

FAIR TRADE ITEMS ARE STILL AVAILABLE AT ZION!!!



- Maybe you have missed your favorite Organic Rooibos Tea, Mind, Body and Soul coffee, Organic Natural Cashews or Organic Total Eclipse Dark Chocolate Bars...
 - Perhaps you are looking for delicious gifts to give at the holidays- *food and coffee baskets will be appreciated as gifts now more than ever!!*
 - Or you have been thinking about making a difference in the lives of small farmers from around the world by supporting Fair Trade Ministry...
- To inquire about the range of products that can be ordered or to place an order, contact Laurel: Call/text: 315-939-9875 Email: lemccurdy@gmail.com



CHRISTMAS AT THE LUTHERAN HOME

Please consider donating...

Blankets, lap robes, or gifts of money that will be used to give the residents gift certificates to have their hair done or to purchase items from the Corner Store on Wheels. Checks should be made out to "Friends of the Lutheran Home" with "for resident use" on the memo line. Shirley Carlson is preparing the box, which will be in the downstairs coatroom. This year, NO toiletries are being accepted. Please call ahead 315-732-4110 to drop off your donations. Deadline for donations is December 14th
Thank you!!