

## **Sunday, December 7, 2014, the Second Sunday of Advent**

### **Advent Candle Liturgy 2014**

Deeply planted in the mystery of life  
is God's love gracing the world with presence and purpose.

Deeply planted in the mystery of life  
is a spark, holding back darkness with possibility. (*light the first candle*)

Deeply planted in the mystery of life  
is a breath, whispering hope in the silence. (*light the second candle*)

**We wait, longing for the dawning of God's new day.**

**We prepare, trying to make room.**

**God too longs for the world's transformation. God too prepares—making us into vessels of light and love, getting us ready to receive anew the gift. Amen.**

### **Prelude**

#### **Call to Worship (see bulletin)**

#### **Opening Prayer**

God of love, God of hope and light.  
You have gathered us in to worship you and give you praise.  
We bless your Mighty name.  
Be in our words, our actions and our thoughts  
That we worthily magnify you  
That we walk in your ways,  
Encountering you in our every turn.  
And in our turning, help us to turn to you in our every need.  
Through Christ the Savior who is coming,  
**Amen.**

#### **Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 (see bulletin)**

#### **Time out for Teaching: Flowering Incarnation**

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming Hymn 162

A flower as the subject for this time of year seems a little out of season. In the bleak midwinter, do flowers bloom?

This hymn comes from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century from an anonymous author who wrote it in German. It sings of the budding and flowering of God's presence into the world.

The bud and flower of God's presence seems to apt. As God's wisdom takes flesh and dwells among us, we might behold it as a miraculous emergence of the holy, seeking a home in this mundane and hurting world.

The word "In-Carnation" means not a flower but God's choice to take flesh, and bring the presence of the holy to us. We might naturally connect the birth of Jesus to the death and

resurrection of Jesus too, because if God really hadn't taken flesh and lived among us, he would not have been able to truly die for us, suffer for us, and rise for us. In other words, if Jesus hadn't really lived a fleshly existence, then all our talk of suffering, atonement is for naught. It's because God took flesh and dwelt among us, truly incarnate, fully human and fully divine, then it means our own fleshly existence matters, and what we do with our lives really matters. You'll hear more about mattering in the sermon. The incarnation is a divine mystery. We can give thanks, for contrary to what this modern world would have us think, there are still mysteries to keep us humble!

### **Isaiah 40:1-11**

*Narrator:*

Isaiah 40:1-11 is a conversation between God and Isaiah. It was Isaiah's call to be a prophet, but it also speaks to us today. Hear the word of the Lord.

*God:*

Comfort, O comfort my people.  
Speak 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.

A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
Every 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.  
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

*Narrator:* A voice says,

*God:* "Cry out!"

*Isaiah:*

And I said, "What shall I cry?  
All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.  
The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.  
The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever."

*God:*

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

### **Mark 1:1-8**

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

<sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’”

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And 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. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He 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. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

### **Sermon: “It’s Down To Us”**

God cares about how we live. That means we should care too. John the Baptist wants everyone with ears to hear to care about what they do with this life. Announcing the coming of the Messiah, he said, “This is your chance to repent, get right with God!

Indifference however, is a major roadblock to repentance. Indifference towards one’s behavior, was alive and well, just as it is today. But if we take very seriously the call to care, we

might realize that repentance begins with each one of us. It's up to each of us to choose wisely, get right with God.

40 years ago a song was recorded by singer songwriter Joni Mitchell, a song called "Down to You." It's about someone who pursues what they want, when they want. It matters not whether his choices are right or wrong, only whether he gets what he wants. Mitchell observes his comings and goings, and then challenges him to change, saying, "It's all down to you...It's down to you...."

We have a choice in how we live this one life God gave us. It's down to you, and to me. Robert Louis Stevenson once said, "Life is not a matter of holding good cards, but playing a poor hand well."

The faithful have always fought against indifference. John the Baptist calls us out of indifference and into caring about what we do with our lives, because God cares too. Jesus fought against indifference. So did the early Christians. The Book of Revelation presses the Church in Sardis, "if only you were hot or cold, but because you are lukewarm, I will spit you out." A prophet's job is to tug at the heart, to care about the same things that God cares about, to challenge the world that has become lukewarm, and to repent of their sin of indifference towards how they live their lives.

What might it look like, if we were to let ourselves care about the same things God does?

It would look like a totally different landscape. The prophet Isaiah says that every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain laid low. Repentance is not just about becoming humble, but a flattening out of our crooked and troubled world. The Kingdom of God raises up those who are low and humbles those who think highly of themselves. When we do that it makes for a much wider vision, and we become much more able, to receive the King of this Kingdom. When

we have repented, that is made a change in how we think about God's world, we are better able to picture God's plan and our role in it.

The promise at Christmastime is even bigger than our personal salvation. It's a whole new landscape for God's world. It's a whole new way of thinking, and a whole new way for us to approach one another. For those of us who think we're the mountains, let us be humbled. For those in the valleys, let them be lifted up. We get to be active participants in God's great landscaping project. And it begins with each one of us in our repentance. The incarnation in action! It's all down to you to make the wise choice. Don't fall into indifference but fight to do what is right. Amen.

### **Service of Holy Communion**

#### **Invitation and Words of Institution:**

Hear the words of the institution

of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ:

The Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest,  
took bread, and after giving thanks to God,  
he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

**Take, eat.**

**This is my body, given for you.**

**Do this in remembrance of me.**

In the same way he took the cup, saying:

**This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood,  
shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is right and good to give you thanks and praise, Eternal Shepherd,  
for walk you with us each and every day,  
through green pastures,  
beside still waters,  
along the summits of our rejoicing  
and in the valleys of our uncertainty.

Your presence has sustained us from generation to generation,  
in the wisdom of our mothers and fathers,  
in the challenges of your prophets,  
and most of all in our risen Lord Jesus Christ,  
the great and mighty shepherd of all.

Therefore we praise you,  
with all who have gone before us  
and all the faithful of every time and place,  
singing with the choirs of heaven  
to the glory of your holy name:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

Great God of power and might,

you are holy and yet you are present with us.

In Christ you came among us to be our true divine companion,  
to know our humanity and to make us whole.

In Christ you suffered even the pains of death,  
but nothing could take away the fullness of your life.

In Christ you rose to new life,  
breaking the bonds of death once and for all  
so that all creation might live in the fullness of hope.

Remembering all that you have done and are doing and will do,  
we take these gifts of bread and cup

to celebrate your presence with us in Christ and in one another,  
that they might be our holy offering of praise and thanks  
and that our lives might always proclaim your life shared with us in Christ.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus:

**Dying you destroyed our death,**

**rising you restored our life.**

**Lord Jesus, come in glory.**

Gracious God,  
pour out your Holy Spirit upon us  
and upon these gifts of bread and cup,  
that the bread we break  
and the cup we bless  
may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ.  
By your Spirit make us one with Christ  
that we may be one with all who share this feast,  
united in ministry in every place.  
As this bread is Christ's body for us,  
send us out to be the body of Christ in the world.

This day we lift up our prayers to you. The names of those who have been mentioned today, and all those rising in our hearts. We take a moment to silently pray to you our prayers.

We lift up your troubled Creation writhing in agony from riots, Ebola, destruction of life and property. We pray your word of peace gently breath across the world and into every heart.

Guide us as we embody your love and joy  
in all our lives and in your world.  
Help us to walk with one another in mercy and peace,  
in justice and joy,  
each and every day,  
that your abundant grace and faith might flow in us wherever we walk,  
until we dwell secure in your love all our days.

Through Christ, with Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all glory and honor are yours, almighty God and Good Shepherd,  
now and forever. **Amen.**

**Prayer after communion**

We thank you, O God,

that through Word and Sacrament

you have given us your Son,

the true bread from heaven

So strengthen us in your service

that our daily living may blossom forth our thankful praise;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**