



4th Sunday in Advent
December 20th, 2020

Twin Towers United Methodist Church

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**Worship words - including the call to worship, centering prayer, pastoral prayer, and Advent candle-lighting liturgy have been adapted from resources written by Sarah Are | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.*

WORSHIP GUIDE

Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, your Advent candles, something to write on and with, your computer/connected device (if you intend to listen to music online), etc. Feel free to adapt this worship guide in any way that makes best sense to you and those you might be gathered with. (Consider inviting someone – a friend, a family member – to worship with you.) Commit to spending the next hour with God.

PRELUDE - Listen and sing along to a song or hymn that blesses and centers your spirit!

WELCOME – **Edwina Gately, Journey with Jesus*

God is soaked in our world.

**God's Spirit lives and breathes
in and through all that is.**

We are lost

**only when we do not understand
that God is already with and in
each one of us.**

Our task is recognition
of God's initiative
**to be at home in us—
acceptance
of God-With-Us.**

Then we cannot but be glad.

CENTERING HYMN - “Come, Let Us Dream” W&S 3157

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ku-N7dhpp18>

1. Come, let us dream God's dream again.
Come, one and all, let us ascend
the mountain top where those of old
saw God's new day on earth unfold.
2. The lame shall walk, the blind shall see,
the doors swing wide, all prisoners free,
3. When hatred ends and war shall cease,
so all may dwell in deepest peace,
then be assured the time is near
when perfect love casts out all fear.

CENTERING PRAYER – *You are invited to take a deep breath as you pray:*

Our prayer this Advent season, O God,
Has been to dream your dreams: To see them in our heart, to imagine them in our minds,
to taste them in our mouths, to dance with them in our spirits, and to feel them alive and
growing in our bellies.

We have dreamed with the prophet Isaiah
Of you tearing open the heavens and coming down, of good news being proclaimed to the
oppressed and the heart broken, of mourning turned into gladness, devastation and ruin being
repaired and built up.

We have dreamed with John the Baptist
Of your coming, showing us your way in the flesh,
And with Mary,
Of being seen and claimed, of the world made right, made whole.

But this morning, we pray that these dreams be born in us, that you be born in us.

We pray that the Holy Spirit might come upon us,
And the power of the Most High might overshadow us,
And that we might have the courage, the audacity, and the hope,
To say “Yes!”

We pray to become not only dream-bearers, but God-bearers.

We pray this standing on the shoulders of the prophets, of John, of Mary, and of all those
who have ever said “Yes!” and in the name of the One who was born in a stable, Jesus the
Christ. Amen.

SCRIPTURE - Luke 1:26-45 / NRSV

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷
to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name
was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” ²⁹
But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰
The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now,
you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He 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. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there

will be no end.”³⁴ Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”³⁵ The 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.”³⁶ And 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.³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.”³⁸ Then 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.

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country,⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

This is the Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God!**

LISTEN -

On the first week of Advent, our Sunday School kids learned the story that we just heard, the story of the angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary, except in the video they watched, great interpretive liberties were taken in telling the story. Gabriel, rather than being majestic or shiny in any way (he was, after all, an archangel and aren’t angels always shiny?) was a short, rather rotund, rather awkward angel whose wings were entirely too small and who has to pay not one, not two, but three visits to Mary before she accepts the announcement that he brings. In fact, she screeches on his first attempt, refusing even to take the announcement scroll, and runs away and hides as soon as he appears the second time. The whole thing made me chuckle because it read our humanity - our dismay, our bewilderment, our resistance, and our fear at God’s movement in our lives - into the lines between the scripture. While the video clearly took liberties, there was something real in Mary’s reactions. I can’t be alone in wondering how Mary could have moved so quickly from “How can this be?!” to those hallowed and revered words, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”? How could she have so readily accepted this preposterous news that literally put her life in danger and turmoil? How could she have so seemingly easily opened herself up and made herself available to bearing God into the world? But perhaps what’s even more astonishing than Mary’s “Yes”, Friends, is why

our God for whom nothing is impossible, chose to break into our world, into human history, through Mary, through a girl, a poor girl, a poor Palestinian girl, through someone so completely devoid of power, influence, or standing. What does that mean to us, to you and to me?

This morning, on the final Sunday of Advent, as we round the corner into the final few days before Christmas, I invite you to place yourself into today's story and be awed and inspired by both what God is doing and by Mary's willingness to collaborate, and then to ponder what dream, what promise, what hope, our God - the God of impossible possibilities - might be conceiving in you, even now, because you too are highly favored, you too are needed to bear God into the world?

After 400 odd years of silence - that's how long it has been between Malachi, the last prophet recorded in the Old/Hebrew Testament, and our story today - God's angel bursts onto the scene with the most incredible announcement. Or rather, the second most incredible announcement for Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, was visited by an angel six months prior and told of her miraculous pregnancy. It would seem that God is on the move once again.

Yet God's movement isn't exactly as Isaiah longed for, with the heavens being torn open, and God coming down, mighty and powerful and flashy. But it is still stunning. For into the lives of ordinary, faithful people - Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph - people, perhaps, like you and me, God was indeed breaking in.

I've often wondered what Mary was doing when Gabriel showed up. In so many medieval paintings, she is portrayed as sitting, so beatifically, by a window or at a table, sometimes with what looks like a Bible open before her, when the angel appears. In these pictures, it is as if Mary is expecting Gabriel and is not in the least bit startled. But how could that be? What in Mary's short life could have possibly prepared her not just to encounter Gabriel, but to hear and make sense of his announcement, and then to assent to it? She was, after all, a young girl, a young peasant girl who couldn't have had a lot of expectations about life. While our reading tells us that Mary was "much perplexed" by Gabriel's greeting, other translations use the words confused and troubled, thoroughly shaken, and disturbed. Makes sense doesn't it? Then again, Gabriel has only said "hello", or rather, "Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you." He hasn't even told her the big news yet! Once that's been laid out, that she will conceive and become pregnant with the "Son of the Most High", a holy child, a child who will become king, Mary asks the only question that can be asked, "How can this be?"

It's a good question, isn't it? It's the very question on all of our minds. How can this be? How exactly is Mary supposed to get pregnant...with the Son of God no less? That's crazy! And even if she managed to get pregnant, how would that child become king? People don't just become kings! Especially people whose mothers are from Nazareth, the town known for producing nothing good. We can get all kinds of tripped up in the impossibility of God's dreams, can't we, which in turn gets in the way of our wholehearted collaboration. We can't act on something we don't believe, can we? But Mary's question, while it may be about all those things, is also about herself. "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" I think Mary was asking less about the biological improbability of what was being proposed, and more about herself and her qualifications to participate in such a plan. It is the same question asked by many of the great leaders of the Hebrew Testament when called upon by God to take part in God's dream: Me? How can I do what God's asking? How can I lead God's people out of slavery? How can I be the one to prophesy to God's people? How can I participate in God's dream? I am not qualified, equipped, or able.

Gabriel's answer is profound because it reminds us that this isn't, in the end, about Mary. It isn't about us. It isn't about us and our fabulous resumes or the lack thereof. It's about God, a God for whom nothing is impossible, a God who sees possibility in everyone, a God who has never worked by our rules or understanding, a God who works salvation and wholeness with and through us. It's about God and what God's doing. Maybe we don't believe in ourselves, but can we trust God?

"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Trust is often like that, isn't it? Like taking a flying leap off the ledge of being perplexed, of holding tightly to the questions of "how can this be?" and falling into the mystery of God's presence and power.

Meister Eckhart, the 14th century mystic, wrote, "We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? Then, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of God is begotten in us."

As we await the arrival of Christmas, may Mary's story move us from who we think we are to what God has called us to be. May we open ourselves wide to the impossibility of becoming mothers of God, and of God being born in us. And may we trust God just enough to, like Mary, "take part in a plan we did not choose and do things we don't know how to do for reasons we do not entirely understand." May we take into everyday ahead Gabriel's first words to Mary: "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." Amen.

CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY

I dream of music that makes my heart swell.

I dream of trees that take my breath away.

I dream of sunrises that wrap me in light.

I dream of family dinners that feel like home.

I dream of church services that give me hope.

I dream of love as the default.

So today, as we draw near to Christmas day, we light the candle of love.

Light 4 candles.

May this light burn bright as a reminder that God is here and God is love.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God for a love like that. Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE – *Spend time in prayer. What did you hear for yourself through today's scripture and reflection? Talk to God about it. Then lift up the joys and concerns that are in your heart. You might write them down, speak them aloud, or pray them in silence.*

I would be honored to pray with you and for you.

Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give me a call if I can do so.

SHARING OUR GIFTS– *How might you offer yourself and all that you have to God this week? How are you being invited to practice generosity? Spend a moment listening for God's direction.*

You are invited to contribute financially towards the purpose and ministry of TTUMC. We are a congregation committed to being conduits of God's healing in our neighborhood and beyond, and in so doing, impact the last and the least. You can contribute by mailing in a

check, dropping off cash, or giving online via PayPal (visit www.twintowersumc.org). Take a moment and do that now. Please also be sure to return your Stewardship Response Card via mail or online [here today!](#)

CLOSING HYMN - “Toda la Tierra (All Earth is Waiting)”, UMH 210,
Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baAS2Tfad2s>

1. All earth is waiting to see the Promised One,
and the open furrows, the sowing of the Lord.
All the world, bound and struggling, seeks true liberty;
it cries out for justice and searches for the truth.
2. Thus says the prophet to those of Israel,
“A virgin mother will bear Emmanuel,”
for his name is “God with us” our brother shall be,
with him hope will blossom once more within our hearts.
3. Mountains and valleys will have to be made plain;
open new highways, new highways for the Lord.
He is now coming closer, so come all and see,
and open the doorways as wide as wide can be.
4. In lowly stable the Promised One appeared,
yet, feel his presence through the earth today,
for he lives in all Christians and is with us now;
again, with his coming he brings us liberty.

BENEDICTION -

May you go from this place, waiting - waiting for God to be born in you and in the world.
May you go from this place, keeping watch - for glimmers of joy and grace, for sparkles of
God-with-us. May you go from this place, prepared and ready, to bear God’s dream and
love into the world. Go now in peace!

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST’S PEACE!

SCRIPTURE for Dec. 27th, 2020: **Luke 2:22-40 & Isaiah 61:10-62:3**