

## **Prelude**

### **Informal moments**

Thank you to all those that Helped decorate the church.

We are still looking for Advent readers for every week leading up to Christmas. So if anyone would like to read an Advent message and light a candle, please let me know.

We are doing a Movie night on Dec. 10. At 6 pm. Anyone is welcome to join.

Take a look at your bulletin for any other announcements.

### **Song**

*Holy God We Praise Thy Name*

Hymn #79

### **Call to Worship**

Leader: All creation holds its breath.

**People: The time is almost here.**

Leader: The heavenly choir of angels waits for its cue to sing.

**People: Excitement is all around us.**

Leader: Prepare your hearts—The grace of God takes on human forms. Good news! Emmanuel, God-with-Us, comes to us.

**People: We gather to make ready our hearts for the coming of Christ, our hope.**

**SEAT PEOPLE**

## Sharing of Joys and Concerns

### Pastoral Prayer

Precious Lord, during this challenging season of life, we dare to open our whole selves to your transforming work of love. Yet, we have also discovered the many obstacles that we often place in the way. We recognize how often we rest in complacency, not appreciating the simple pleasures in life, how attached we become to controlling our environments, how easily we succumb to fears and shrink from trusting. Save us from our fears, our hoarding, our selfish tendencies, that we might become the people we want to be, the persons you have called us to be. Yet you are the God of light – who sees us as our perfectly imperfect selves and loves us just the same. You continue to invite us to come to you, trust you, and surrender ourselves into your care. And you meet us in this place. O Loving God, we are learning that there is little in life that we cannot bring to you in prayer. You are the source of our strength and hope, and healing. Amid this gathered community lie so many needs. We pray for each of the vulnerable all around us and grant them comfort in this time of uncertainty. We want to lift the following to you and your glorious power:

And so we take a moment as we offer our own silent prayers to you now.....  
We lift this all up in your name and pray together the prayer you taught us.

### 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.*

*Amen.*

## The Children's Moment

**Song**

*There's Something About That Name* Hymn #171

**SEAT PEOPLE**

**Advent Reading**

**Scripture**

Matthew 1:18-21 (NIV)

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **Sermon**

Would you please join me in prayer? As we begin this season of Advent, Almighty God remind us again that you are bringing us peace to calm our anxious spirits and hectic lives amid our darkness. So turn our hearts again toward you. Make us ready to receive your Son, our Savior. So slow our pace, and give us the blessing of feeling your peace in our spirits, for we ask this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Good morning again, and welcome to Hartford United Methodist Church. If you cannot tell, it is the start of the Advent season. During the next few weeks, Pastor Seth and I will be working out of the Bible study guide *Christmas Gifts That won't Break*. This Bible study is where most of today's sermon came from. In this study, James W. Moore makes the point that God's gifts are unbreakable and eternal. In the first four chapters, he focuses on God's blessings that are represented by the four candles of the Advent wreath: Hope, Love, Joy, and peace. The Advent Wreath, like the one behind me, dates back to the time of Martin Luther. It is traditionally made of evergreen.

The circle of the wreath symbolizes eternity. The candles may be either purple or blue. Sometimes the third candle, symbolizing joy, is pink. Finally, a white candle to represent Christ is in the center of the wreath. The promise of Advent is that God hears our longings, sends Jesus to reconcile us, and then sends us as messengers of that reconciliation. Advent is a beautiful time, even if you get frustrated with the commercialization and the business of it all like I do. There is something beautiful happening in the hearts of people who long for something else, who hope that we will find what our hearts yearn for.

Now that we have all that information, let's focus on the candle of hope. When I first read through the Bible study, I was a little confused about the Scripture we read and how it had to do with hope. The Scripture talks more about when Joseph found out about Mary being pregnant with Jesus. It took me a second read, and honestly, my wife helped me a little to understand the point they were trying to make. What does this Scripture have to do with hope? The Bible study says it all has to do with Jesus's name.

We're not going to start there, though. Instead, we are going to begin with, Joseph and Mary. Did you know that only sixteen verses in the Bible mention Joseph by name? We all know the story of Joseph and Mary. Mary found out she was pregnant out of wedlock and Mary was a virgin. Joseph was indeed shaken and heartsick. But being the guy he was and loving Mary as

much as he did, he decided to leave Mary quietly and not humiliate her in public. During this thought process, an angel appeared to Joseph, telling him, "Don't be afraid. Go ahead and take Mary for your wife. Your love for each other is unique and special. The Spirit is with her, bringing a new life. The child is of God. It is God's will that she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

This appearance of the angel to Joseph is one of the first signs of hope we are given in this passage. In the Bible, as we all know, angels are messengers from God, so imagine the hope you would have when you were blessed with the presence of one. Joseph also probably hoped that Mary would still be his wife because she was giving birth to the Savior. Joseph was instructed to name this baby Jesus.

The Bible study discusses how names are important. It talks about how some people live up to their names. If your name were smiley, then you would be smiling all the time. It says that a name can have a dramatic effect on the development of a person's personality. The importance of names is a powerful and significant theme in the Bible. James W. Moore points out that The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible states, "The giving of personal names in ancient Israel was not merely for the purpose of providing a distinctive label for an individual, but was also commonly for expressing religious convictions associated with the birth of a child or its future." For example, the name Elijah means "the Lord is my God." Elijah was a mainstay prophet when it came to worshiping God and not giving in to other Gods. Another great example is Moses. Moses means to draw out. Moses drew out the Israelites from Egypt. We can also look at whenever Jesus was around for a dramatic change in someone's life. Their name would get changed in life—for example, Simon's name to Peter, "The Rock."

With all that information, we can look at Joseph and his naming of Jesus. Joseph had big shoes to fill. None of us have been asked to do what Joseph did in raising Jesus. The announcement that the angels gave to Joseph wraps up Christmas hope in a nutshell. Having Jesus being born and saving us from our sins means that God will always be with us. Watching over us, reconciling us, and saving us in this world and the world to come. Suppose we look at the words that we just sang. The name Jesus means "savior." Jesus lived up to this name. He is our Savior, our Redeemer, and our Reconciler. He makes us all one. He breaks down the dividing walls and shows us that we are God's family. And that is our hope for peace on earth and goodwill towards all people.

Jesus's name brings the gift of hope for healing. So Peter and John said, "Stretch out your hand to bring healing and enable signs and wonders to be performed through the name of Jesus, your holy servant. So we pray in Jesus's name and believe that mighty name is found in the gift of hope for healing.

Jesus' name brings the gift of hope of refuge. We believe that in times we are afraid, times we are at war, and times we find ourselves refugees in foreign lands that there is hope in Jesus. Our ancient proverbs tell us that the Lord's name is a strong tower. The righteous run to it and find refuge. The prophet Zephaniah called out to an exiled people to seek shelter in the name of the Lord. So there is hope for shelter in the name of Jesus.

Jesus's name brings the gift of hope for deliverance. Jesus's disciples will throw out demons in his name. Those who boldly go out to share the hope found in Jesus find this power. There are some things that only Jesus's name can cast out.

Jesus's name brings the gift of hope for salvation. Everyone who calls on his name will be saved. We are saved by calling on the name of Jesus and the first guy to say it was Joseph. He may not have said much, but what he said was important.

The power that Jesus's name has to change what we hear about ourselves. Encountering Jesus is not just about hearing his name. But it is also about hearing our names spoken differently. All the characters in the story of Jesus coming into the world as a baby find that what they are called has new meaning because of Jesus.

We could look at our name as I don't have enough. Many of us would simply say I don't have enough. I don't have enough money, time, energy, or compassion. Joseph had to feel that way. But Joseph heard God call his name. Joseph's name means The Lord will add. Joseph's name actually means that God will give more. God wants to tell us that. There is more. Your name with the Lord will increase. You are right; you don't have enough. You can't do this on your own. But God will give us more.

Our names are beautiful. We are beautiful. We are made by God. We are made in the image of God. We are made with the love of God, and we are made to love like God. And we receive this gift of hope in our new names; we speak it to others. So we need to tell people who think they are ugly that they are beautiful. They were made in the image of God. If we tell them they are beautiful, we can watch them change in front of our eyes. Tell some who are bitter that they are blessed. Every person is a child of God and a blessed person of worth. Tell someone who thinks he is forgotten that you indeed remember him. Tell someone who is tired and doesn't have enough that God's strength is available to her. God is sending you in Jesus's name. On the darkest of days, we can still find light in people and the world around us, often the most unexpected places and moments.

So, in conclusion, the only thing we know Joseph to have said is Jesus. When the baby was born, he looked at him, the Son of God in the flesh, and said, Jesus. It is the name by which one day everyone knew will bow. It is the name that sends demons scurrying away to dark places. Our God is not indifferent. Our God, through Jesus, is relational and benevolent. Our God draws us to love through grace. Be with Christ and be sent. Thank God for Joseph, who said the name Jesus and brought the gift of hope to the world. Joseph gave us our first unbreakable gift of hope and helped us to remember. Anyone of us whose life and happiness depends on material things will surely be disappointed because material things do not last. They go out of style. They wear out. They break. Will you pray with me?

God of hope, as we journey through this holy season of Advent, may we open our hearts to receive your amazing gift of hope. Hope that will not break, hope that will not disappoint us. Open our eyes that we may see others who need to receive your gift of hope and be with us as we share the hope of Jesus Christ with others. Amen.

## **Song**

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

*Hymn #196*

## **\*Benediction**

Lord, we surrender our whole life to you, the past, the present, and the future. In sickness and in health, in life and in death, we belong to you. Lord, we want to be changed into the person that You want us to be, and to leave behind the things of the flesh, to walk in newness of life, and in spirit and truth with Your Holy Spirit in the driving seat of our lives. Thank You, Lord, for the work that You are doing in us. In Jesus' name, we pray,

Amen.