

## Informal moments

- Our local ministerial association is hosting a float in this year's Hometown Christmas parade. We are looking for volunteers to help decorate that float on December 5th, and to participate as members of a nativity scene. Anyone of any age can stand in, and Cowboy Way Church has all the costumes and props we might need. If you're interested in helping, please let me know by Monday morning.
- Our ministerial is also hosting a caroling event for Hometown Christmas, and would welcome anyone who would like to help sing out some Christmas cheer to join us. If you'd like to help lend your voice to that, please let me know as soon as possible!
- Bishop Ough has urged all United Methodist Churches within the Dakotas Conference to suspend in-person worship through Christmas. I have approached many of our key leaders, and they are agreed that while this is a difficult decision to make, we want to support every effort in keeping our community that much safer when it comes to this virus. This action may very well save lives, and it is a faithful response to our call to love our neighbor. Though my heart is heavy in this decision, I share the Bishop's concern and echo his reminder that the Church is not cancelled. We will still celebrate Christmas and the love, hope, peace, and joy that Christ brings.
- Communion Cups are available at the Church office for at-home communion.
- Nocturne Circle's Christmas party is cancelled this year.
- We have candles available at the Church for at-home Advent Wreaths!

## Song

*Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*

UMH 196

## Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Johnson family

You are welcome to light your own candles at home to participate in this with us.

## Sharing of Joys and Concerns

### Pastoral Prayer

- Coronavirus around the world
  - Doctors and nurses, as well as support staff such as cooks, janitors, housekeeping
- Those in our Church and families fighting cancer, addiction, depression, and other illnesses.
- Cindy Lesinger, longtime member of the community, passed away on Monday.
- The many Americans who are facing food shortages and loss of jobs in this season.
- Conflict continues to escalate in Ethiopia, as the military is shelling a regional capital city.
- Recent assassination of an Iranian scientist is raising tensions in the Middle East.

### 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.*

**Scripture**

Isaiah 9:6-7 (NRSV)

*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and his named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of God and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Song**

*For Unto Us A Child Is Born / Open the Eyes of My Heart*

## **Sermon**

Today we are celebrating the start of the Advent season. It is a time of anticipation, longing, and waiting... Feelings we are intimately familiar with in the midst of a pandemic as we wait and long for a return to normalcy. Sadly, that time of waiting will have to continue, but it gives us an opportunity to understand the emotions and themes of Advent in a new way. To help us with that, we are also launching a new series based on pastor Adam Hamilton's book entitled "Incarnation." This series is going to focus on what it means for Jesus to be the incarnation of God... It is a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith, which makes the claim that the God who created all that is, who sustains the universe by his power, came to us in Jesus. He didn't simply inspire Jesus, or speak through Jesus as God might inspire or speak through others today. No, the incarnation claims that God actually became flesh in Jesus. As we begin this journey through Advent, and learn more about the historic doctrine of the incarnation, will you please pray with me once more? O Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each and every one of our hearts be holy and pleasing to you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

As you probably recall, Election Day was not that long ago... It is still fresh in many of our minds. It's always an important day for our nation, but one that also highlights and exaggerates the deep divisions in our society. It is a nationwide competition of sorts, where someone wins and someone loses. Someone becomes the "leader of the free world." And as much as we may hate the polarizing effect elections have on our nation, many of us participate in it through our conversations and our use of social media. And then, just three short weeks after Election Day, Advent arrives and Christians across the world prepare to celebrate the birth of their King.

Whatever those of us who are American Christians may think about our president, and whoever we may have voted for in the various elections, this season reminds us that there is only one King. It is to that King that we give our highest allegiance. While our politics may divide us... *Have* divided us, Advent should bring us together, uniting us around the newborn King and his life, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection. That's a key part to this season.

Advent invites all who consider themselves Christians - whether they are Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, Independents, or something else entirely - to come to the stable, to fall on our knees as the shepherds did, and yield our allegiance, our hearts, and our will to the newborn King.

That's why it's so important for us to truly understand the significance and purpose behind the incarnation... Behind the idea of God taking on flesh and dwelling among us as one of us. Throughout the Church's history we've often struggled to explain the *how* of the incarnation, but personally I'm content to let the *how* remain a mystery... It far more important for us to understand the *why* of the incarnation. And part of that understanding will come by looking at some of the titles that Jesus used... Especially the royal titles like Messiah.

The word Messiah literally means "anointed" or "anointed one," and it refers to an individual or even an object upon which a special oil has been poured as a way of setting that object or person apart for God's purposes. For Israel, this oil was used to anoint the priests, as well as the furnishings of the Tabernacle and the Temple. This would be a way for them to dedicate the priests and those instruments to God, to signify that anyone and anything anointed by this oil was holy, set apart for something special. But by God's direction, the prophet Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel. From then on, each of Israel's kings would be anointed by the prophets. Like the priests and their altar furnishings, the anointing of the king happened at God's direction, and on God's behalf. It signified that the king was holy to God, set apart for God's purposes, ruling on behalf of God, representing God and doing God's work. This is a symbolic event that is still used today, in countries like Great Britain where monarchs still hold office.

And while the prophets, the priests, and other furnishings were anointed, it is the role of the king that would become most closely associated with anointing in Scripture. King Saul, King David, King Solomon, and all those who followed after them were hailed as *messiah* - as the Lord's anointed. But out of all those kings, one became the standard by which all others would be judged: David.

His story is very prominent throughout Scripture. He is named over one thousand times in the Bible, more often than anyone but Jesus. David was far from perfect, and yet God loved him, showed him mercy upon mercy, and used him to shepherd God's people. God even established a covenant promise with David... The promise that a descendent of David would rule over God's people *forever*. That promise had a profound impact on the Jewish people. They found hope in that promise during long periods of exile or when foreign kings ruled over their land. In such times, the prophets would recall God's promise and remind the people that the day would come when God would raise up a new king, a new *messiah* like David to shepherd over God's people. Even hundreds of years after David's death, the prophets remembered that promise. This promise is echoed in the words of Isaiah, roughly 700 years before Jesus' birth. They speak to unfulfilled hope of the Jewish people. They were yearning for a *messiah*, an anointed king to lead them.

As a nation, we are waiting for our newly elected leaders to take office. These elections are focal points of power and wealth. It is estimated that over \$2 billion have been spent in the election. Soon, there will be an inauguration on the steps of the US Capitol with thousands of people looking on. Afterwards there will be parties with food, wine, and dancing. Our president will live in the White House with some of the world's best security for him and his family. He will be the leader of the free world, and the Commander-in-Chief of the most powerful military on the planet. Now contrast that with the King whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. Born in a stable, and laid in a feeding trough. Born to an oppressed people with little to no security or power.

Around 30 years after his birth, Jesus began his campaign for the office of King. He traveled from town to town, giving speeches about the kingdom of God. In these campaign speeches he called for people to love God, their neighbors, and even their enemies. He called everyone to be humble and kind. To value integrity, forgiveness, and selflessness. He asked them to care for the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned, and the immigrant. He spoke out against arrogance and hypocrisy.

His campaign team was a group of people, many of whom were women, who would travel with his twelve disciples and provide support for his work. The disciples themselves were Jesus' campaign staff, though they had never done this work before. They were fishermen, a tax collector, and others with little education. Misfits and ragamuffins, if you will. Hardly the team any of us might assemble for such an important task. Jesus' campaign took him through all the cities and villages, and all the regions in between... Wherever he could find a place to preach, teach, and heal every disease and sickness. He had compassion on the people who were helpless, the sheep without a shepherd.

And it's a little strange to think of Jesus as on a campaign trail, but that's probably how many saw him, especially the disciples. They anticipated that at some point he would be anointed as king, and they would rule with him. And yet, in so many ways, Jesus went about his campaign all wrong. People were wanting a king who would raise an army to push Rome out of the land. Instead, Jesus called his fellow Jews to love the Romans. Rather than pursue the endorsements of the rich and powerful, Jesus criticized them time and again. He surrounded himself with the poor and the powerless. He made no promises about lowering taxes, or increasing jobs, or defeating the Romans. He didn't promise to make Israel a great nation once again. Instead, he simply spoke about welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and caring for the sick. And he challenged us to do the same. He urged us to let our light shine by our good deeds, and to draw people into God's kingdom.

Ultimately, Jesus is anointed by a few women... Not a priest or prophet, as might be customary. Jesus is crowned... not with gold, but with a braid of thorns fashioned by Roman soldiers. Jesus is exalted as he is stripped, nailed to the cross, and hoisted into the air for all to see. And there he hung, slowly dying for hours, a king nobly laying down his life for his people. We know that isn't where the story ends. Through the resurrection, Jesus shows us that his authority as King extends over death itself, and afterward he invites us to continue the work he had begun... To teach what he had taught and bring others into the Kingdom of God.

Today, nearly a third of the world's population claims Jesus as their King. Far more have been influenced by Jesus' teaching, the values he shared, and the life he lived. Jesus is the most influence person the world has ever known. For those of us who count him as King, as I do, we wake up each morning recognizing our highest allegiance, our deepest devotion, and our greatest commitment is not to country or political party or even to family... But to Jesus the Christ, our *Messiah*. He is the King who chose to walk among us, as one of us, so that we might know who this king of the universe really is, that we might hear his voice, know his will, and live as his people. We are meant to do more than simply pray for God's kingdom come, thy will be done, but to work to make that kingdom a reality.

I don't know your politics. But if you are a Christian, I know your King. His sermons, his parables, his instructions and example of loving God and neighbor represent the laws of his kingdom, and our allegiance to him comes above all others. And so this Advent, I want to invite you to be the incarnation of Christ yourself... To yield your life to him, and follow him as your King, so that together we can usher in God's kingdom of hope, love, joy, and peace today. Let's pray.

Blessed are you, our God, King of the Universe. You came to us in Jesus to show us who you are and who you call us to be. We yield our lives to him. Jesus, be our Christ, our Messiah, our King. To you, O Lord, we offer our time, our talents, our resources, our influence, and our all to you. Help us live in such a way that we honor you in all that we do, for we love and we praise you for all that you are and for all that you do. It is in your royal name that we pray. Amen.

**Song**

*Hail to the Lord's Anointed*

**\*Benediction**