

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 21, 2025

10:15 am

Prelude

Announcements

Call to Worship

Here in worship— **we pray together,**
we stand together, **we sing together,**
we listen together. **Here in worship— we are not alone.**
So when life gives you reason to grieve, to fear, or to worry,
remember this moment.

We are not alone. Let us worship our with-us God.

Call to Confession

Friends, every day we are given choices—the choice to be a friend, to be an ally, to extend a welcoming hand. Some days we choose wisely, but from time to time, we inevitably get it wrong. That is one of the many reasons we need the Prayer of Confession. In this moment of prayer, we are able to practice the art of forgiveness. So join me in this transformative moment. Join me receiving grace. Let us pray.

Prayer of Confession & Words of Forgiveness

When you were afraid, did I stay by your side? Did I offer my hand, or did I leave you alone? When you were afraid, did I choose solidarity? Did I see your fear, or did I only see mine?

Friend, none of us are perfect. We all make mistakes. Fortunately, God offers grace, and we do too. So take a deep breath, and let's start again.

Thank you. Your mercy is a gift. **Now we must ask— when you were afraid, did we stay by your side? Did we offer our hands, or did we leave you alone? When you were afraid, did we choose solidarity? Did we see your fear? Or did we only see ours?**

Friends, none of us are perfect. We all make mistakes. Fortunately, God offers grace, and I do too. So take a deep breath, and let's start again.

Thank you. Your mercy is a gift. We accept your grace and would love to start again.

May it be so, with God's help. **Alleluia, amen.**

Advent Candle Lighting

In a world full of fear, where do you see the presence of love?

We see love all around us. We see love when people hold open the door. We see love in a warm embrace, a homemade casserole, a phone call after a long day.

We see love in random acts of kindness and intentional acts of empathy. We see love all around us.

You are right. Even in a fearful world, love is all around us. Today we light the candle of love as a reminder of this good news. May this flicker of light help us remember that even in a fearful world, love is here. Love is world-changing. Love is shining bright. We only have to look for it.

Light candle.

Thanks be to God for a love like that! Amen.

Gathering Hymn: ELW #254 "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

1. **Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in thee. Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art, dear desire of ev'ry nation, joy of every longing heart.**
2. **Born thy people to deliver, born a child, and yet a king; born to rein in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone; by thine all sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.**

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Prayer of the Day

Immanuel, we turned off alarm clocks. We poured cups of coffee. We slipped shoes onto our feet and combed back fly-away hairs. We traveled to this room and settled into this space, all in hopes of drawing closer to you. So as we hear your Word read aloud, help us to feel your presence in our midst. For we are reaching out our hands. We are reaching out our hearts. Speak to us now. With hope we pray, amen.

Readings and Psalm

First Reading: Isaiah 41:5-10

⁵ The coastlands have seen and are afraid;
the ends of the earth tremble;
they have drawn near and come.

⁶ Each one helps the other,
saying to one another, "Take courage!"

⁷ The artisan encourages the goldsmith,
and the one who smooths with the hammer encourages the one who strikes the anvil,
saying of the soldering, "It is good,"
and they fasten it with nails so that it cannot be moved.

⁸ But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;

⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth
and called from its farthest corners,

saying to you, "You are my servant;
 I have chosen you and not cast you off";
¹⁰ do not fear, for I am with you;
 do not be afraid, for I am your God;
 I will strengthen you; I will help you;
 I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

Psalm: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

¹ Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth

² **before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us!**

³ Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

⁴ **O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?**

⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure.

⁶ **You make us the scorn^[a] of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.**

⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

¹⁷ **But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself.**

¹⁸ Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

¹⁹ **Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

Second Reading: Romans 1:1-7

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³ the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit^[a] of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Acclamation

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew starting with the 1st Chapter. **Glory to you O Lord.**

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah^[a] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and

said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son,^[b] and he named him Jesus.

Sermon

Hymn of the Day: ELW #257 "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appears.

Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you O Israel.

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

3. O come, O come, O Lord of might, as to your tribes on Sinai's height in ancient times you gave the law in cloud, and majesty, and awe. *Refrain*
4. O come, O Branch of Jesse, free your own from Satan's tyranny; from depths of hell your people save, and give them vict'ry o'er the grave. *Refrain*
5. O come, O key of David, come, and open wide our heav'nly home; make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery. *Refrain*
6. O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer; O Sun of justice, now draw near. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadow put to flight. *Refrain*
7. O come, O King of nations, come, O Cornerstone that binds in one: refresh the hearts that long for you; restore the broken, make us new. *Refrain*
8. O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. *Refrain*

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Affirmation of Faith

We have seen the valley.

We have seen a sky without stars.

We have seen the longest night, and *still* we believe.

We believe in a with-us God.

We believe in the hope of tomorrow.

We believe that good news is louder than fear.

We believe this good news is for all people.

So even when our knees shake, even when our voice trembles, even when fear is all around us, we will hold onto that good news.

**We will reach for each other.
 We will look for God in our midst.
 We will sing songs of joy.
 We will proclaim: *Unto us, love is born.*
 We have seen the longest night, and we have seen unimaginable love.
 So *still*, we believe. Amen.**

Sharing of Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you all. **And also with you.**

Prayers of the People

Ever-reaching, with-us God, we don't always know the words to pray. We stumble over our words. We meander in our thoughts. We fail to be eloquent when we try. But no matter our words, we know that you are listening. So today, holy God, we want to say thank you for the "reachers."

Thank you for the people in our life who have reached for us when we have needed it most. Thank you for friends and family, for Sunday school teachers and confirmation mentors, for therapists and school chaplains, for neighbors and attentive strangers. Thank you for the people, who like Joseph, chose to reach for us and stay by our side when we needed it most. We pause to remember their names and faces now, and to silently lift these individuals to you in gratitude.

Moment of silence. (continued)

Holy One, while we count our blessings, we also pray for those who face their fear alone. We pray for those who do not have a Joseph in their life. In particular, we remember those in isolation jail cells, and for those in medical quarantine. We pray for single parents, and for widowers. We pray for immigrants and foreign exchange students, who so often feel alone in a new country. We pray for those who feel isolated by their grief, their addiction, or their mental health.

Show us how to reach across dividing lines.

Show us how to walk with each other, on the good days and the bad.

Show us how to see each other.

Show us how to reach for each other.

As you do, like Joseph, we will do our best to walk each other home.

With hope for a better tomorrow, we pray. Amen

Offering and Offertory Hymn: ELW #253 "He Came Down"

- 1. He came down that we may have love; he came down that we may have love; he came down that we may have love; hallelujah forevermore.**

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Offering Prayer

God of healing and hope, you bless those who are hungry, promising to fill them with good things. Fulfill that promise through us and these your gifts.

Nourish us with the abundance of your feast and unite us into the blessed body of Jesus Christ our Savior, now and forever. Amen.

The Great Thanksgiving

With-us God, We live in a fearful world. If we're honest, we come to this Table today with the taste of fear on our tongues. We come to this Table carrying our anxiety. We come to this Table asking for guidance. We come to this Table with all of life's "what-ifs."

But you do not disregard our fear. You do not brush it under the rug or call us foolish. You do not ignore the realities in front of us. You do not dish out hurtful platitudes, telling us to "toughen up" or "power through." Instead, you meet us here. You listen to our fears. You remind us that we are not alone. You surround us with people who love us. You show us where we are strong. You walk beside us. So today we pray, gracious God: replace the fear on our tongues with these words of hope:

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.

As we come to this Table, pour out your Spirit on this bread and cup. Remind us that even in a fearful world, you are on the move. Remind us that even in a fearful world, you are here, inviting us to the Table, nourishing our spirits, reminding us that we belong, calling us by name.

Instill that good news in us, for this is a joyful feast. Fear is not the loudest voice today. What a gift that is. Now with hope for a better tomorrow, we join our voices together to pray the prayer your son taught us to pray, saying. . .

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.

Invitation to the Table

Friends, did you ever have a moment growing up when you walked into the school cafeteria, panned the faces in the crowd, and wondered if you were going to have a place to sit? Did you ever have a moment, maybe as a new student or at the start of a new school year, when fear nibbled at the back of your mind because you weren't sure where you belonged? I imagine, at some point or another, most of us have experienced that kind of fear. But here at this Table, you never have to wonder. Here at this Table, there is enough room, enough food, enough love for everyone. Here at this Table, Jesus is standing up on his chair, waving his hands over his head, saying to each of you, "I saved you a seat!" Here at this Table, you are wanted and welcomed. You are safe and

loved. Here at this Table, you belong. So my friends, there is no need for fear here, for this is a joyful feast. And you are invited. Come. All are welcome.

Distribution Hymn: ELW #715 "Christ, Be Our Light"

- 1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see.**

Refrain: **Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.**

- 2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled. Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us. Make us your living voice. Refrain:**

- 3. Longing for food, many are hungry. Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed. Refrain:**

- 4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless. Longing for worth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others, walls made of living stone. Refrain:**

- 5. Many the gifts, many the people, many the hearts that yearn to belong. Let
us be servants to one another, signs of your kingdom come. Refrain:**

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Prayer after Communion

Loving God, In a world racked with fear, you gather us together. You set the table. You meet us here. You nourish our bodies as you nourish our spirits. You remind us that this is a joyful feast, and that fear cannot win every time. So with renewed courage, with renewed hope, with renewed conviction, send us out into the world. Help us to feed others as you have fed us. With gratitude we pray, amen.

Benediction

In a fearful world, may you look for God's spirit. May you reach for each other's hands. May you choose courage whenever you can. And in all things, may you remember that good news is louder than fear. In the name of the one who calls, the one who sends, and the one who journeys with—go in peace and *be not afraid*. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn: ELW #723 "Canticle of the Turning"

- 1. My soul cries out with a joyful shout that the God of my heart is great, and
my spirit sings of the wondrous things that you bring to the ones who wait.
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight, and my weakness you did not
spurn, so from east to west shall my name be blest. Could the world be
about to turn?**

Refrain: **My heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the fires of your justice
burn. Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near, and the world is
about to turn.**

2. Though I am small, my God, my all, you work great things in me, and your mercy will last from the depths of the past to the end of the age to be. Your very name puts the proud to shame, and to those who would for you yearn, you will show your might, put the strong to flight, for the world is about to turn. *Refrain:*

3. From the halls of pow’r to the fortress tow’r, not a stone will be left on stone. Let the king beware for your justice tears ev’ry tyrant from his throne. The hungry poor shall weep no more, for the food they can never earn; there are tables spread, ev’ry mouth be fed, for the world is about to turn.

Refrain: My heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the fires of your justice burn. Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn.

4. Though the nations rage from age to age, we remember who holds us fast: God’s mercy must deliver us from the conqueror’s crushing grasp. This saving word that our forebears heard is the promise which holds us bound, till the spear and rod can be crushed by God, who is turning the world around. *Refrain:*

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Dismissal

Go in peace. Do not fear.

Thanks be to God.

Postlude

 **Prayers:** Please continue to keep our members and loved ones in your prayers, including Arlen, Lan-Shiang, Deb, Ruth, Barry, Monica, Dennis, Nathan, Sue and Donna Richards, the family of Beverly Devoe and the Hruska Family.

 **Weather Related Closings:** Please tune into KEYC TV.

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