

The Sunday Missive – December 19, 2020



The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Introit: *Gabriel's Greeting* Mary Sue Gee, Soloist

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Nancy Castle, Mary Sue Gee, Janis Johnson, Jeff Wheelwright and I bring you this service of prayer, scripture and song with love. If you go to our facebook page, you can watch and participate from home:

[facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay](https://www.facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay) Scroll down until you see today's Sunday Missive, anytime after 11 A.M. on Sunday, December 20. No facebook account is needed! The links that follow each hymn will take you to youtube videos of a wide range of people around the world singing those hymns – enjoy them! Please direct any questions or comments to your rector, The Rev. Sidney Symington via: (203) 209-2339 or: sssymington@gmail.com.

And so we begin:

Gracious Creator, we praise you for your child Jesus, who is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, the wisdom that teaches and guides us, the Savior of every nation. Let your blessing come upon us as we light this wreath. May it be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation. **Amen**

God of love, you are the true sun of the world, evermore rising and never going down. We pray you to shine in our hearts, that the darkness of sin and the mist of error being driven away, we may this day, and all our life long, walk without stumbling in the way you have prepared for us, which is Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God in glory everlasting. **Amen**

Eternal God, in the psalms of David, in the words of the prophets, in the dream of Joseph your promise is spoken. At last, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, your Word takes flesh. Teach us to welcome Jesus, the promised Emmanuel, and to preach the good news of his coming, that every age may know him as the source of redemption and grace. We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose day draws near: your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. **Amen**

Hymn 640 – Watchman, Tell Us of the Night

Watchman, tell us of the night, what its signs of promise are.
Traveler, o'er yon mountain's height, see that glory-beaming star.
Watchman, does its beauteous ray aught of joy or hope foretell?
Traveler, yes; it brings the day, promised day of Israel.

Watchman, tell us of the night; higher yet that star ascends.
Traveler, blessedness and light, peace and truth its course portends.
Watchman, will its beams alone gild the spot that gave them birth?
Traveler, ages are its own; see, it bursts o'er all the earth.

Watchman, tell us of the night, for the morning seems to dawn.
Traveler, darkness takes its flight, doubt and terror are withdrawn.
Watchman, let thy wanderings cease; hie thee to thy quiet home.
Traveler, lo! the Prince of Peace, lo! the Son of God is come!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6t7ZJk-a1Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OL9-WfgvkQY>

A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to Titus – Chapter 2

But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine. Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance. Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us. Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back, not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

The Magnificat

My soul magnifies the Lord* And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant* Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.

For the Mighty One has done great things for me* And holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him* From generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm* He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones* And lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things* And sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel* In remembrance of his mercy,

According to the promise he made to our ancestors* To Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9_YrI6rSc4

Hymn 265 – The Angel Gabriel

The angel Gabriel from heaven came, his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
"All hail," said he, "thou lowly maiden Mary, most highly favored lady," Gloria!

"For know a blessed Mother thou shalt be, all generations laud and honor thee,
Thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold, most highly favored lady," Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head, "To me be as it pleaseth God," she said,
"My soul shall laud and magnify his holy Name." Most highly favored lady, Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say--
"Most highly favored lady," Gloria!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4mR6HXRARI>

A Reading from the Gospel According to Luke – Chapter 1

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. Her name was Mary. And the angel said, "Greetings, O favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 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. And now, your cousin Elizabeth in her old age has also

conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” 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.

Whatever our view of Luke’s Nativity narrative: absolute historical fact, beautiful sacred myth, or sweetly apocryphal fiction, makes little difference. As Nancy so beautifully described last week, Mary listened to the best of her ability to the will of God, she tried her hardest to determine what the best use of her life would be, and she gave everything she had to act accordingly.

Abbot Andrew Marr has written recently about how attitude and outlook can determine the very quality of our lives: God does not wait for us to be perfect or anything close to perfect before granting us unconditional love. The word for repentance – *metanoia* – in the New Testament does not mean an end to sin so much as a turning of the mind in a new direction. To base our lives on God’s unconditional love amounts to just such a radical turnaround for most of us. Most of us live by assessment, accusation, blame and comparison. Our lives tend to be energized by the quest for equaling, chronicling, imitating, surpassing, overcoming or avenging the actions of others: Unconditional love may be all well and good for Jesus, but we have lots of good reasons to withhold absolutely unconditional love in just about every situation. Meanwhile the hope of our own forgiveness offers us both the ability and the endurance to face this habitual dependence on judgement and comparison and set these habits aside – one habit at a time, one day at a time.

As we talked about last week, we need neither to prove Mary nor Elizabeth to have experienced a physical miracle (their pregnancies) in order for their experiences to be miraculous to us. Their miracles are just the same as ours can be. Yes it’s unlikely that our lives will take a course like that of John the Baptist, let alone Jesus the Christ. But what we can do is say yes to the revolution of repentance that Advent depicts and demands. We can latch onto hope as if our very lives depended on it – which they do.

Both Elizabeth and Mary might have taken the opposite attitude: they stood to be too old to be parents, or too unwed, and been desolate, horrified, embittered, desperate, doomed. But instead the two of them, three if we count the baby who leaps in Eliz’s womb at the nearness of the unborn Jesus; they become the first disciples, the first to say yes to Emmanuel – even before Jesus is born, the first to know that God’s self is among us and with us and in us.

If we're listening, we can hear God's admonition to do as Mary did: to embrace the truth and joy of life's continuity -- our human connectedness -- and the paradox of our singularity and ephemerality. Each of us is at once a timeless soul and a shooting star.

Mary's vision of hope enables her to choose to say 'yes' to God and 'no' to everything ungodly: her fears, her previous experience, her position in society. Each of us has the invitation and the opportunity to bear hope in our hearts too, and to give birth to Christ's love in our lives, if only we will, like Mary and Elizabeth, meet our friends with joy and affirmation when they tell us about saying no to the ungodly and yes to love. Then the courage will come. *Ku bügg léem - ñemel yambb!* say the Wolof: If you like honey, brave the bees.

Our austere (and guilty) teutonic ancestors took the darker view: *Loben nicht den Tag vor den Abend*. Don't praise the day before it's evening. Maybe so, but we can be hopeful. Who takes things slowly has the shortest road, and the future comes to each of us. So, as the prophet has said, "Look to today for it is life, the very life of life. In its brief course lie all the realities and verities of existence: the bliss of growth, the splendor of action, the glory of power. For yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow only a vision, but today, well-lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness, and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this day." The future comes to each of us; and we can choose to make it a future of hope. Now that's something to want for Christmas!

Prayers

O Great Love, thank you for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings. Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other's burdens and the weight of glory. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of the ailing, strife-ridden societies of this world and your sorely abused and endangered planet. Knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer our prayers in all the holy names of God. *Amen*

We pray for those who are far off and those who are near, especially those we name now -- silently or aloud -- I ask your prayers for Katharine Burton, for the families and friends of Don Rose, Doris Hryckvich, and Richard Leslie, for the home-bound, especially Dorene Hughes, Dee Gatchel, John Severson, are there others? We pray for the beloved of this community who are sick, injured, undergoing medical treatment or in recovery; and for all

who are in any need or trouble this day – especially those whose lives have been ravaged by the global pandemic. Bring your peace and healing O God.

God of all races, nations, and religions, you know that we cannot change others, nor can we change the past. But we can change ourselves. We can join you in forming our only and common future as you would have it, a future where Love reigns equally over all. Help us to hear you, the one God of all the earth, and to live into your good will for all Creation.

Blessed are you, Lord our God. How sweet are your words to the taste, sweeter than honey to the mouth. How precious are your commands for our life, more than the finest gold in our hands. How marvellous is your will for the world, unending is your love for the nations. Our voices shall sing of your promises and our lips declare your praise forever and ever.

Hymn 72 – Hark! The Glad Sound!

Hark, the glad sound! the Savior comes, the Savior promised long:
Let every heart prepare a throne, and every voice a song.

He comes, the prisoners to release in Satan's bondage held;
The gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield.

He comes, the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure;
And with the treasures of his grace to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace, thy welcome shall proclaim;
And heaven's eternal arches ring with thy beloved Name.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfjHJZSFw7g>

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this. And thus the blessing of God Almighty: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you and yours this day and remain with you always. **Amen.**

An Extra Treat – Alison Krauss and Yo-Yo Ma duet: The Wexford Carol

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxDZjg_Igoc