

ADVENT 2024 ON THE WAY TO BETHLEHEM



Serve & Enrich
Zion United Church
of Christ

The 2nd Sunday of Advent – Jerusalem: A Place of Waiting

Prelude

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Gathering: Light for the Journey

A Message from our Guide—On the way to Bethlehem, we travel to Jerusalem. The Temple is the site of the dramatic high point of Zechariah and Elizabeth's story of waiting so long for prayer to be answered. As Zechariah carries out priestly duties and Elizabeth waits outside with others, the usual and customary becomes anything but ordinary! An angelic messenger reveals a divine plan that leaves Zechariah literally speechless.

Advent Wreath Lighting—It feels poignant that this week we visit Jerusalem in our Advent story and the city is known as “the city of peace.” Certainly, we've been focused on the difficulties of prevailing peace in this turbulent part of the world even today. There is also the matter of our own “new Jerusalem” within. We wait for the day when we will feel more peace, have more peace, within ourselves. This week, we ask, “what are we waiting for?” and we learn that what happens within us *while* we wait is as important as the outcome. Can we be at peace—work for peace—“live peaceably”—even while waiting?

Advent Wreath Song

O Little Town of Bethlehem/We're On Our Way

O little town of Bethlehem,

We're on our way

how still we see thee lie!

We're on our way

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep

Dream of the day

the silent stars go by.

When peace holds sway

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

With all the earth

the everlasting light;

In all our hearts

the hopes and fears of all the years

We're on our way

are met in thee tonight.

This is the day.

Advent Wreath Reading—The journey continues, and this candle will help light our way. We are on our way to more peace. Life is full of expectations and waiting for the right time, the right answer, the right opportunity. We are a people who wait for Good News. It is hard to wait, but there are milestone

moments when we get a glimpse of what true peace feels like. God's light goes before us, we are not alone.

*We're on our way
We're on our way
Dream of the day
When peace holds sway*

*With all the earth
In all our hearts
We're on our way
This is the day.*

Opening Prayer and Words of Assurance—Holy and Living God, we pray to you in the midst of unanswered questions. Often we are anxious and impatient as we desperately want to know outcomes and chart our life's path with certainty. Give us patience, God. Call us to pause in peaceful surrender, even and especially when the pieces of our lives seem to be falling apart rather than getting put together. Open our hearts to know your enduring presence in this very moment, in this waiting. We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus, the Christ, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Let this be a marker of assurance that we are moving in a faithful direction: God is with us every step of our way toward the Peace of Bethlehem. Jesus is being born into our lives even now. The Spirit is transforming us in this place.

****Hymn**

O Come, All Ye Faithful, 182

Prayer—God of Peace, we come to you today longing for your presence in our lives and with all those who suffer—in body, mind, or spirit. We pray this day for... *[continue with prayers for those in your community and around the world who are in need of healing and wholeness]*

God of Peace, we come to you today so deeply grateful for celebrations, triumphs, and even small steps toward the lives we seek and the world we desire. We pray this day for... *[continue with prayers of thanksgiving]*

Holy God, we know you are near. We know that every step along the way to Bethlehem in this Advent season is a step closer to renewed life in Jesus, the Christ. We know that your Spirit resides within us, growing day by day into the fullness of Peace. In this moment, we pause in silence, marking your presence with awe and asking you to fill us and guide us, along our journey.

The Lord's Prayer (unison)—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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Choir Anthem

Exploring Together—Bookends and Dirt Baths

We Hear God's Word

Collin Bennington

Romans 12:9-18—⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Luke 1:5-17—⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no children because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

⁸ Once when he was serving as priest before God during his section's turn of duty, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to offer incense. ¹⁰ Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹ Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴ You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Meditation

Jerusalem: A Place of Waiting

Hymn

Angels We Have Heard on High, 188

We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving

Invitation—As we prepare the way of the Lord, let us open our hearts to share gifts of love and mercy—gifts that are pleasing to our God.~

December Benevolence—The Christmas Fund

****Doxology**

To the tune of “Away in a Manger”

*Praise God for these gifts that we offer today
and bless them for good in the world, this we pray.
Praise Jesus, the Christ-Child, our Hope and our Stay,
the Spirit, our Keeper, our Guide on the Way.*

****We Give Thanks**—As you rescued your people of old, rescue us over and over again, Mighty One...bless the gifts we bring before you now. Through our offering, may those who sit in darkness find their way into the light of your loving arms. Amen.~

A Message from Our Guide—We have checked the signs and markers to make sure we are moving in a faithful direction. With renewed peace, we move on towards Bethlehem, knowing that the Light of Christ shines through the night. We are not alone. Our waiting is transforming us into those who know the gift of dependence on God. We release our expectations and open to new possibilities we have not imagined. Peace, not panic, perseveres.

Hymn

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear, 191

Benediction—And now as you go forth from this place, know that all the places you encounter in the world will contain signs and markers of God’s work among us. So keep your senses alert, your perception wide, and your heart open to new discoveries along the way.

****Sung Response**

*O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us we pray,
cast out our fear, and draw us
near; be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our
Lord Emmanuel.*

*We’re on our way
We’re on our way
Dream of the day
When peace holds sway
With all the earth
In all our hearts
We’re on our way
This is the day.*

Postlude

Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne