

Order of Worship

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 20, 2020

WELCOME

PRELUDE

Fugue in C

G.F. Handel

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

Psalm 89: 1-4, 24-25

HYMN 250

Once in Royal David's City

IRBY

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1: 26-38

PASTORAL PRAYER AND 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.

HYMN 242

Love Came Down at Christmas

GARTAN

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1: 47-55

MESSAGE

Loving Home

Rev. Angela Utter

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 230

O Little Town of Bethlehem

ST. LOUIS

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

In Dulci Jubilo

W. Zachow

Prayer Corner

We lift up Barb Hunger as she recovers in rehab after a hospital stay. She is planning to move to Primrose soon. We pray for her to experience God's grace, strength, and healing presence as she navigates these changes and challenges.

Loving Home Rev. Angela Utter – Darlington/Fayetteville UMC

“Love came down at Christmas...love all lovely; love divine; Love came down at Christmas...” Wait, just then? I love that line, and in true fashion for the home I grew up in that’s about all the words I can come up with off the top of my head—and I don’t know if I got the right words anyway!

In our house Mom sang. Out of tune or whatever you call it... she had her own notes. She danced in the kitchen too. We were encouraged to sing along into a wooden spoon and let your feet slide around on that linoleum floor.

But it was Dad that you wanted to sit by to sing in church. He knew the notes, he read the hymnal closely, and it was a special occasion to sing Christmas songs with him...we always saved him a spot because he tried to get home from work in time to join us for part of the 11 pm service. “Love came down at Christmas... love all lovely; love divine; Love came down at Christmas...” it sure did in our house.

In our scripture today Mary hears from Gabriel, the angel, that she was going to be with child. That idea, that knowledge, that gift... that’s a big one! Women for decades have wrestled with what to do with that knowledge, and in the case of Jesus, it is a young woman that is wrestling with it.

Although Gabriel told her: “do not be afraid” (Luke 1:30), I think that maybe, just maybe, she had a little fear in her. She seems calm, as she asks: “How can this be?” (Luke 1:34). The answer the angel gave her seems to satisfy her. She does or says what many of us might think of as impossible, she says: “Hear am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

Ok, I will give most of you the benefit of the doubt: you might respond like Mary did: “here I am”. You might even listen calmly to the Angels’ explanation. And you might, just might not pee your pants during the whole encounter. But then what? Do you really keep your cool? Do you sit peacefully in the field where the angel greeted you and hum a tune from your mother’s kitchen with whatever notes the wind brings you? No.

If we keep reading, we would hear that Mary walked a long way to Elizabeth. I love that story... dig into that one folks! The beauty of a young woman feeling so comfortable with a relative that

upon hearing life-changing news that she goes to her. Or does she go to Elizabeth because she is the wife of a priest, because Elizabeth has a Loving Home? Hmmm...

Let's jump back to the angels' words: "do not be afraid" (Luke 1:30) Have you ever been told to not be afraid? Do you remember what happened just after that? Surely it was something that at least raised your blood pressure if not made your stomach fall out. People don't say "do not be afraid" and then hand you a cookie or give you a hug; they say it when something terrifying or life-changing is about to happen. And if we trust the one speaking, we try our best to contain our fear. How we handle news like Mary heard might depend on how we were raised.

We know that Mary was engaged to Joseph. According to Matthew 1:16, Joseph was a descendent of David. There were 14 generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the exile, and 14 generations from the exile to Christ.¹ Obedience, promise, redemption of humankind seems to happen in 14 year intervals.

And now we have a young woman, Mary, about 14 years old, being told that she will be welcoming the Christ—the Saviour of the World. A woman as young as our high school students is to be the mother of the One that will Save us from our sins. I told you this was BIG!

A loving home: that's what my colleagues have named this week. And I like the idea. If we think about the place that Jesus would grow—first in the precious womb of an obedient and faithful servant of God. Then in the family group that included a cousin that was long hoped for and cherished and obviously raised in the knowledge of God. With an aunt who felt blessed beyond measure and an uncle who had the privilege of seeing the same angel. Sounds like a makings of a loving home to me!

If you were to help me make the list, what would you add? A place that smells like sugar cookies, not just at Christmas? A structure that not only made you feel safe, but bore the markings of the folk that had found refuge there in the past? If we were making the list of a Loving Home, would the place, the walls even come up?

¹ Matthew 1:17

This year especially, as we think about being Home for Christmas, many of us have to rethink or re-prioritize the place and think about the people. In every other year of my life, I would say that my idea of Loving Home included sitting by my loved ones in worship. Now I know that I can worship with them while we each sit in our own home.

Loving Home... that is what Mary gave Jesus. I think that is what Elizabeth gave John. And I know that is what my mother gave me—full of hugs, hope, songs and laughter. I can do that: I can hope, I can sing, I can laugh. I can hold dearly in my heart the feeling of a good hug.

You know Jesus was born into a loving home, that's what my colleagues and I concluded, even though if you really study his birth, he wasn't born into a safe space. It was about relationship. It almost always is. If the relationship is safe, the structure will work itself out. Friends, as you look around this day for love—I pray that you find it at home. I pray that decorated or not, clean or not, prepared or not, that that space that you find yourself in offers you room to breathe in the breath of life, and causes you to sing.

Today we celebrate that “Love Came Down at Christmas. Love Divine”. We celebrate that we are blessed; that we do not need to be afraid. We celebrate that even as Mary was called “favored one²” that we are called “beloved children of God”³.

God chose Mary to make a Loving Home for Jesus and God chose us to make loving homes where people will grow in their knowledge and love of Christ. It's a tall order for each of us, but one that we can do if we approach it like Mary did: listen, ask questions, and turn to trusted ones for help.

May your home be full of Love as you await the coming of our Lord--

May your songs be full of joy--

May you truly know no fear--

And may you be blessed with a loving home in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

² Luke 1:28

³ John 1:12