



UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA MELFORT ETHELTON PASTORAL CHARGE

Office: (306) 752-2288 Email: melfortuc@sasktel.net

Website: www.melfortunitedchurch.com

Worship Time: 10:30 AM

Ministers: All of us

Worship Leader: Bea White, Irene Steward

Music: Jodi Allen Corbett

Music Director: Mavis Peters

Office Administrator: Denise Todosichuk

Caretaker: Faye Greier

Today's Greeter:

Scripture Reader: Robin Miazga

ORDER OF WORSHIP

December 13, 2020

Third Sunday of Advent, Year B

WE GATHER AS A COMMUNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

As we gather for worship today we acknowledge that the land on which we gather is Treaty 6 Territory. We honour the Cree and Métis people for whom this place has been a homeland for thousands of years. We respect the sacredness of our home and the ground on which we walk and we are grateful to gather here in peace and hope.

ANNOUNCEMENTS, ANNIVERSARIES & CONCERNS:

CALL TO WORSHIP:

God's spirit is upon us.

God has anointed each of us to be bringers of comfort and good news.

Some of us are discouraged, others are broken-hearted.

**Some of us are joyful and filled with laughter;
others of us long for better circumstances.**

Restore us to each other and you, O God.

**As we comfort one another and celebrate the good news,
we remember God is with us and for us.**

Come, let us worship.

Lighting the Advent Candle:

Advent 3B: *Mary*

As three candles are lit someone says:

One candle to remind us of the prophets, the second for John the Baptist, and the third for Mary, who gladly responded to the call of God.

Someone reads:

“I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary, “may it happen to me as you have said.” **(Luke 1:38).**

STARTLING GOD, WE THANK YOU FOR THE JOYFUL OBEDIENCE OF MARY. WE ASK YOU TO FILL US WITH YOUR GRACE, SO THAT WE, TOO, MAY ACCEPT YOUR CALL, AND REJOICE IN YOUR SALVATION.

HYMN (VU 7) “*Hope is a Star*”

OPENING PRAYER: *(in unison)*

God who loves justice and truth,
we remember your enduring covenant that promises good
news to the poor, the broken-hearted, and the captives.
You promise comfort to all who mourn and a mantle of praise
in place of discouragement.
Refocus us on our restoration in you.
We are a people blessed,
and we rejoice and praise you, O God.
Grow righteousness and praise within us this day, we pray.
Amen.

HYMN (VU 62) “*Once in Royal David’s City*”

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE: *(in unison)*

Mighty God, you call us to proclaim the good news,
but we can be slow in proclaiming joy and faith.
There are times when grief weighs us down;
bitterness creeps into our hearts and minds.
We feel unworthy of the task of discipleship,
afraid to claim the particular gifts you have given us.
Like John the baptizer, however,
we are not called to save the whole world.

**We are called to point to Jesus and invite others
into loving community. Restore our faith.**

**Refocus our understanding of who we are in Christ that
we may rejoice once more, and witness to the Light. Amen.**

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

“As a garden grows its seeds, so God will grow righteousness and
praise” (Isaiah 61:11). We are made to grow in faith.

We are beloved by God, cherished and forgiven always.

God is good. And so are we.

Thanks be to God.

PRAYER RESPONSE (MV 64) “Because you came” - *Verses 1 - 3*

CHOIR ANTHEM: “*Tiny Child Will Come*”

- Besig and Price

YouTube link: https://youtu.be/pHsq4I9Ww_g

WE LISTEN FOR GOD’S WORD TO US

THE LORD’S PRAYER:

MINUTE FOR MISSION:

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

HEBREW READING:

ISAIAH 61:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Lord is upon me.

EPISTLE READING:

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24

*Rejoice always; pray without
ceasing.*

GOSPEL READING:

JOHN 1:6-8, 1-28

John testified to the Light.

SERMON:

Advent without ceasing?

Every Advent, the following debate surfaces: is Christmas secular or religious?

Today, we are in the middle of Advent, a season that includes the four Sundays before Christmas. And while the retail and entertainment industries try to combine Advent and Christmas, they are two distinct seasons. Advent is a month of prayer and repentance before December 25 while Christmas is the 12 days from December 25 to January 6 in which we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

The differences between the two seasons are evident in carols. Christmas carols celebrate the nativity of Jesus while Advent carols focus on preparation for the coming of Christ. Some Advent carols like “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” are beloved while those that focus on judgement and the prophecies of John the Baptist like “There’s a Voice in the Wilderness” are not as well-known or liked.

Recently the debate about the place of secular and religious elements in Christmas has been joined by a new movie about Charles Dickens. I haven’t yet seen “The Man Who Invented Christmas,” but I look forward to it.

The movie is based on the notion that Dickens’ popular 1843 book “A Christmas Carol” helped to establish many of today’s Christmas traditions — things like turkey, Christmas trees, and family gatherings on the secular side and a turn from greed to selfless charity on the spiritual side.

“A Christmas Carol” also illustrates the connection between Advent and Christmas, I believe. While all the action takes place on Christmas Eve and Christmas day, the bulk of the story has an Advent feel.

It begins as the protagonist Ebenezer Scrooge eats a lonely and meager Christmas Eve meal where he is visited by the ghost of his dead business partner Jacob Marley. Marley says that Scrooge will see three more Spirits during the night.

The Ghost of Christmas Past reminds Scrooge of his childhood with his late sister Fran and of his failed engagement to a woman named Belle.

The Ghost of Christmas Present presents Scrooge with scenes of happy family meals and of the terrible suffering of the poor.

The Ghost of Christmas Future shows Scrooge the funerals of two people: one friendless and unloved — Scrooge himself — and one beloved — Tiny Tim, who is the crippled child of Scrooge's employee, Bob Cratchit.

Only when Scrooge wakes on Christmas morning does the mood change. When Scrooge realizes that he has time to turn his life around, he joyously repents of his selfish and ungenerous ways.

Because most of the action is with four ghosts, one could rename Dickens' book "An Advent Carol." The ghosts lead Scrooge on a painful spiritual journey that begins with prophecy and that is heavy with the threat of judgement and death.

As a child, I loved watching the 1951 version of "A Christmas Carol" every year even if it frightened me. It gave me a sense that Christmas was not all tinsel and parties. It was also a time to confront life's shadows and an opportunity for spiritual growth.

I was also glad how the story knit together the secular and the religious aspects of Christmas, the soulful and the spiritual.

The reading we heard this morning from St. Paul leans more to the spiritual than the soulful. He writes about light, wakefulness, and prayer.

Paul's words in Thessalonians about praying without ceasing connect to the concept of mindfulness, which is about being aware of one's feelings, thoughts, and perceptions from moment to moment. As followers of Christ, we can use such awareness to give thanks for God's Grace and to pray for healing, peace and justice.

Achieving a high level of mindfulness can lead to a kind of ecstasy — what Paul calls rejoicing always. But as anyone who has tried to develop a meditation practice can attest, it is a challenge to be awake to the flow of every moment. Much of the time, we drift into unconsciousness, and every night we fall asleep. Prayer without ceasing is a wonderful goal, I believe, but few of us can achieve it.

The good news is that seasons of prayer like Advent have both a beginning and end. We began Advent two weeks ago with a service focused on Hope. We will end the season next Sunday with a service focused on Love. Then Christmas will follow, an annual celebration of birth and light that weaves together the spiritual and the secular in the most wondrous ways.

Personally, I don't see a great need to draw a line between the secular side of Advent, which includes gift-shopping, tree decorating, and stringing lights, and the religious side, which is about repentance and prayer. Both sides can yield joy.

Nor do I see a great need to draw a sharp line between the secular side of Christmas, which includes parties with family and friends, and its spiritual side, which is about the birth of Jesus and the coming of salvation. Both sides of Christmas comfort us.

Nor do I see a great need to separate the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Advent is a time of discovery in which we journey in a prayerful spirit of repentance. Christmas is a time of celebration as we arrive both at Bethlehem and at family dinner tables to relax, feast, and revel in love. Both seasons influence the other, and I find it understandable that each year they blend together.

Finally, I don't see a great need to "put the Christ back in Christmas" anymore than I see a great need to "Keep Christmas out of Advent." However we prepare for the rebirth of Christ in our hearts this year, and however we celebrate the coming of the solstice, we will inevitably blend the soulful with the spiritual and combine elements from our pagan and Christian roots with popular traditions of the last 150 years.

Advent doesn't last forever anymore than our prayers do, regardless of what St. Paul suggests. I am glad that the soulful and the spiritual sides weave together to make communities that are both human and divine and that provide both comfort and joy. Amen.

Posted in: [Sermon Blog](#) Tagged: [A Christmas Carol](#), [advent](#), [christmas](#), [reflection](#), [Scrooge](#), [sermon](#) (adapted)
URL: [Advent without ceasing? – Mill Woods United](#)

OFFERING:

(Please use the offering box at the front/back of the Sanctuary as you exit. Thank you!)

OFFERTORY HYMN (VU 55)

"In the Bleak Midwinter" – verse 4

PRAYER OF DEDICATION: (in unison)

**The prayers we offer,
the gifts we give,**

**are like seeds sown in trust
that God's love will water these seeds
and bring new life, hope, and joy to those who weep.
Hope be within you.**

PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE:

God of comfort and promise,

we pray for the brokenness of the world.

For the hungry and the hurting, the disappointed and the angry,
we pray for your healing and restoration.

Help us be involved in creating communities that actively care
for the broken.

We pray for those who mourn and live with grief.

May we be a presence and solace.

We lift to you those discouragements we have experienced
this week.

Discouragements in our families, our friendships, our jobs,
even discouragement in ourselves.

We lift to you, O God, the different things that drag us down.

Restore our faith in you, O God.

Restore our faith in ourselves and each other.

We have different hurts, worries, fears.

We name them in our hearts and ask for help to trust you
with them.

Bring us comfort; plant the good news deep within our hearts.

Help us to see your restoration of the world when we welcome
a shy or unsure young child, when we listen to the dotting story
and share the joy of a grandparent.

Help us to see your promise of healing in the crusty exterior
of someone genuinely trying to be kind.

As we grow in faith, we pray for the ability to rejoice always
and to pray continually.

We trust that the one who calls is faithful.

Now and always. **Amen.**

SENDING FORTH

HYMN (VU 8) *“Low How a Rose E'er Blooming”*

COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION:

Comfort be among you.

Love be around you.

Go out into the world

Refocused on God's grace

Restored in heart and mind,

And *Rejoicing* at God's anointing of each and every one us
to share Good News.

CHORAL BLESSING *When You Go From This Place"*

- P. Mayberry & D. Kai

PRAYER RESOURCES:

**Seasons of the Spirit – SeasonsFUSION Advent • Christmas • Epiphany 2020–2021; The United Church of Canada Advent • Christmas • Epiphany 2020-2021, Year B, Gathering Resources for Worship Planners. Used with permission.*

NEXT WEEK'S (December 20, 2020 – Advent 4) READINGS

2 Samuel 7:1-11,16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THIS WEEK AT MELFORT UNITED CHURCH

Tuesday, December 15th

@7pm – Women Alive

Wednesday, December 16th

@7 pm – Choir

Pastoral Care - Contact Information

Should you need emergency pastoral care please call Ron Nielsen

@ 306-921-7794 or 306-752-4119.

Transfer or Applying for Membership

If you wish to transfer or apply for membership in our church,
please contact the church office or a member of the
Membership Committee.

Changes to Contact Information

If you have changed your address or phone number, please advise the Church Office so that we can keep your information current.

Thank you!

Offering Envelopes

Due to Covid we are not putting envelope packages for 2021 out in the foyer. If you are out of envelopes please stop by the office and pick some up.

UCW Annual Report & Annual Congregational Report

If you have a submission/report for either of the 2019 Annual Reports please email or drop it off at the church office by Thursday, December 31st.

Renewal time for your subscription for the Broadview (Observer)

Stop by the office by December 17th to pay the \$25 annual subscription fee.

Mittens, Mittens, Mittens!

The Naomi Unit is planning another mitten tree for Christmas Giving this year. If you are an avid knitter, hand knit mittens would be wonderful, but any size children's mittens would be gratefully accepted. The tree will be set up in the foyer to display the mittens. Close to Christmas these items will be donated to a worthy cause.

Stewardship Seconds

God gives us glorious, perplexing, unbelievably wonderful gifts! Stewards recognize them for what they are—and give God the best they have to offer in return.