



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: Peggy George

Music: Jodi Allen Corbett

Music Director: Mavis Peters

Office Administrator: Denise Todosichuk

Caretaker: Faye Greier

Today's Greeter:

Scripture Reader:

ORDER OF WORSHIP

December 20, 2020
Fourth 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:

We come into this place to make a home for Love.

We come to create a structure, to give shelter, to craft a dwelling place for the Incarnation.

God asks, "Have I ever asked for another dwelling place than in my Creation?"

We come into this place to tell the story of a woman who said, "yes"; of a stable and a manger and angels singing before frightened shepherds.

We come to celebrate the birth of the one who would teach us that his life was the beginning of new life for us all. We

come to worship the God who asks us all to say yes to carrying that which will bring justice, mercy, and peace into this world.

We come into this place to remember.

We come into this place to re-imagine our place in God's incarnation.

Lighting the 4th Advent Candle:

(The first three candles are lit).

Today we kindle the Advent candle of Love.

(The fourth candle is lit).

**We welcome the warmth that lightens the winter chill,
the warmth that comes from the heart of God.**

Come, Holy Stranger, messenger of love on this Advent journey:
welcome us as we welcome you.

We receive the light of love.

HYMN (VU 7) "Hope is a Star"

OPENING PRAYER: (in unison)

**God of all wisdom, our hearts yearn for the
warmth of your love,**

And our minds search for the light of your Word.

Increase our longing for Christ our Saviour,

And strengthen us to grow in love,

**That at the dawn of his coming we may rejoice in his presence
and welcome the light of his truth.**

This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

HYMN (VU 2) "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE: (in unison)

**Holy One, Creator of the Universe, we praise you with
humble hearts.**

**For you created us out of dust, frail creatures in deep need
of one another.**

**Yet into our weakness you breathed your Spirit that your
love might dwell within us.**

Yet we confess, Merciful God, we become prideful in the

image of you which we carry.

We puff ourselves up, and we put our desires ahead of the needs of our neighbours.

Though you took on human form to lead us to eternal life, we seek to contain you within that flesh.

We confess that we have tried to domesticate you, to put you in a comfortable box that we can admire and love without having to listen to what you are calling us to do and be. Forgive us, God of all.

Forgive us when we are proud, and scatter the thoughts of our hearts.

Forgive us when we put the acquisition of wealth and status ahead of the care of neighbour and Creation. When we do not feed those who hunger, send us away empty.

Forgive us when we set ourselves up as rulers and arbiters over others. May we know our place.

Forgive us when we hear this ancient, beautiful story of your love and do not reflect on how you continue to speak into our lives today.

Forgive us when we do not resist the harm that is being done to Creation.

Forgive us when we lack the courage to re-imagine the world as it is, for in doing so we delay the world that is to come.

Forgive us, God of all, and call us again into renewal of the ancient covenant and the promises of your mercy. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

God did not wait until we were ready to call us into participation in the Beloved Community. God knows our weaknesses, has mercy on our transgressions, and looks with compassion upon our fearfulness. Friends, hear the promises of God: we are loved, we are renewed, we are forgiven. **Thanks be to God! Amen.**

PRAYER RESPONSE (MV 64) *“Because You Came”* *Verses 1 - 3*

CHOIR ANTHEM: *“Who Shall Appear”* – J. Purifoy

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMGyeErEgHU>

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD TO US

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

MINUTE FOR MISSION:

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

HEBREW READING:

2 SAMUEL 7:11,16

Who will build God's house?

EPISTLE READING:

ROMANS 16:25-27

*Glory to the only wise God,
through Jesus Christ*

GOSPEL READING:

LUKE 1:26-38

The Angel Gabriel visits Mary

SERMON:

When Love Can Change Everything

Today's message is a mixture of my thoughts and a sermon written by Rev. Emily Heath.

Let's start by thinking about what Advent is – a time of waiting and wonder. The time of HOPE, PEACE, JOY and now LOVE

One of my favorite Christmas carols is *O Little Town of Bethlehem...*

This year we have faced unprecedented times of isolation, upheaval, and change. We continue to face a global pandemic, which has rocked us to the very core. At Melfort United Church we have chosen to hold church "virtually" because we love our church families and want to keep them safe. In Canada we are fortunate to have support for the most vulnerable, and reliable free health care. Yet when I think of the story of Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem, I wonder if they ever felt isolated or did their LOVE and God's promise give them Hope, Peace and Joy.

How still we see thee lie... The global pandemic has changed the way we do worship, mission, youth work, fall supper, noon luncheons, garage sales, pretty much every aspect of our church. It

makes me feel sad to imagine church without choirs and congregational singing, especially as we approach Christmas.

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

The everlasting Light

The hopes and fears of all the years

Are met in thee tonight

Rev. Heath writes that she firmly believes that Christmas is the best time of the year for movies and TV specials. Everything from *It's a Wonderful Life* to *A Charlie Brown Christmas* to *Elf* to *the Grinch* to *A Christmas Story* and beyond. Let's not count out the Hallmark movies and *the Sound of Music*.

But while they are all great stories, they are not **the** story. Because in the midst of all of the more modern Christmas stories, we have the original story, the one that in a real way gave birth to all the others.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we have the story of a key player in the birth of Jesus, someone who had to be on board with everything that was about to happen, and someone whose love would change everything: Mary.

In Luke's passage we hear how Mary responded to the unexpected and confusing news that she was pregnant. She said "I am the Lord's servant; may it happen to me as you have said". Mary obviously had a strong belief and LOVE for God to accept this news so readily.

In a real way, to choose to LOVE God, especially in times when we are asked to respond to a new challenge or a new reality in our lives such as a pandemic, has a lot to do with how we love. And if anyone could understand what it means to respond to God in the midst of the unexpected, it was Mary.

Mary's situation was a little more dire than most of ours, and she was the first person who was asked to respond to the Christmas story, but she wasn't the last. Because though we are called to participate in the Christmas story in a very different way than Mary was, we too are invited into this story none-the-less.

That's because at Christmas time, if we are going to be a part of this Christmas story, we are called to make the hard choice to love. I don't use that phrase "hard choice" lightly. I use it because loving this world, and loving one another, requires something from us. It requires us to invest in others. It requires us to give of ourselves. And, most of all, love requires us to be willing to be changed.

Let's go back to those Christmas movies again. When you think about it, as much as these are Christmas stories, they could also be Advent stories. Because Advent is all about getting ready. Advent is all about our own transformation. It's about preparing our heart for someone who is coming, and about opening it up to new ways of being.

Christians are supposed to transform the world for good. But that's a tall order. It's hard to change the world. We can do our best, we can work for good, we can pray for peace, but in the end, we find out an important truth: you can't create love in the world, until you find love in yourself. And love changes us.

Even Christmas movies and Hallmark know this.

Scrooge realizes the error of his ways, and his heart is transformed, and only then does he give generously. Charlie Brown finds meaning with his sad little Christmas tree despite the fact the whole world has gone commercial, and no one understands what Christmas is really about anymore. And we all know how the Grinch hates the celebrations, hates the singing, hates the presents, and hates the whole thing. But in the end LOVE wins him over and he says to himself, "Maybe Christmas, doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more."

You and I are not Who's from Whoville. But we are Christians. And we are the people who spend this time of year preparing our hearts for the one who is yet to come, and being transformed in the process. And our LOVE is something we can share with the world.

This time of year, no matter what is happening around us or should I say what isn't happening....the traveling to see families, the social times, choirs singing anthems and carols, we are called to prepare our hearts to love anyway. We're asked to open them up and to get ready to welcome Christ into the world. But more than that, we are called to love that world.

That's because Christ still comes into this world. Christmas still happens. It didn't just happen once, it happens all the time. Christmas may be about the story of Mary and Joseph, the baby and the manger, and no room at the inn, and that little town in Bethlehem. But that's not the end of the story. The great Christmas story continues to play out, and the truly incredible thing is that you and I are invited onto the stage, and we even get to choose our own lines.

And so, as we prepare for Christmas Eve just a few days from now, here's the big question: What is your script going to say?

My hope is that your script is going to be full of the words and actions of one who wants to rejoice with God, and to live out Christmas. My hope is that it will be of a person who has been transformed by the love of God, and who now wants to love the world because of God.

The Grinch, Scrooge, Charlie Brown, and all the rest...those are great stories. But so is yours and mine. And this Christmas, if you really open your hearts to the love of Christ, then your story is about to get even better. I can't wait to hear it. And neither can a world that could use some good stories right about now.

As you experience the HOPE, JOY, PEACE AND LOVE of this Advent season, we send our Blessings to you, today, tomorrow and always. Amen!

YouTube Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TK63tVc0Cw&t=3s>

OUR RESPONSE

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)

Creator God,

we bring our gifts and ourselves, our treasure and our heart.

**Bless us, in all that we offer, that our offerings might be used
in your call to us:**

**to be stewards but not owners of that which have been given,
to be places in which you abide but not where you are
constrained.**

**Bless us, that in our giving, we might open ourselves to your
call to seek justice and mercy for all that you have created,
for all that you love. Amen**

PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE:

Loving God, throughout history, you have been active in this world, speaking, guiding, whispering, and nudging us to be the people you know we can be.

You have spoken through angels, messengers of your grace, justice, and love.

You have spoken through prophets, the truth-tellers of our world who call us from self-interest to community, from human limitation to divine vision.

You have spoken from our own flesh, embodying all that it means to be human.

From your newborn cry to your final, heartbroken words, you spoke to us of the abiding love and the enduring covenant, which have never failed, no matter how often we have turned away.

You have spoken, Holy God, throughout all generations. Help us to hear you speaking to us now.

Help us to take the ancient stories of our faith and learn from them, as Mary did.

Help us to re-imagine the words of prophecy that still speak truth to our lives, that we might learn to respond to the enduring truth of your call.

Help us to resist the temptations that have followed humanity since the beginning.

May we set aside the idols of wealth and status, self-interest and self-importance.

May we abandon the conceit that being made in the image of God means that God is just like us.

Help us to re-imagine what it might look like to say yes when we hear your call;

to not focus on what might be hard, but rather on what might be made possible.

Help us to carry you within ourselves.

Help us to embody your holy love so that it is not only our souls that magnify you but our words and our deeds.

Help us to remember that your incarnation continues, as you dwell, not within the buildings we construct, not in church or synagogue or mosque or temple but within the very love of our hearts.

Help us to say, "yes" to you, God of Grace. **Amen.**

SENDING FORTH

HYMN (VU 30) *“Hail to God’s Own Anointed”*

COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION:

Peace be with you.

Love be in you.

Mercy be among you.

Justice be around you.

Go out into the world

Reflecting God’s presence

Resisting fear

Re-imagining your place in the ongoing incarnation of God’s holy love.

CHORAL BLESSING (MV 209) *“Go, Make a Difference”*

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 24, 2020 Christmas Eve) READINGS

Isaiah 9:2-7;

Titus 2:11-14;

Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THIS WEEK AT MELFORT UNITED CHURCH

December 24th –

Christmas Eve Service – Posted on YouTube

You Tube Link will be sent in the weekly update email

Church Office Closed

The church office will be closed from December 25th to January, 5th, 2021, donations will still be accepted during this time. You can

drop the donations in my mailbox or mail them to Box 1064. I will periodically check the voicemail and email over the holidays if you have any pressing concerns.

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.

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

We are called on to share our tangible gifts, and also the intangible ones—joy, laughter, compassion.