



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**
235 South Kenilworth Avenue, Elmhurst, IL
Partners in Christ's Service since 1890

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT - PEACE

At Home or Small Group Worship

November 29, 2020

OPENING HYMN – *audio available on the church website*

Meg McGarry, vocals

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE

#125 Come, O Long-expected Jesus

Come, O long-expected Jesus,
born to set your people free.
From our fears and sins release us;
Christ, in whom our rest shall be.
You, our strength and consolation,
come salvation to impart;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of many a longing heart.

Born your people to deliver,
born a child, and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever,
born your gracious realm to bring.
By your own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by your all-sufficient merit
raise us to your glorious throne.

CALL TO WORSHIP

It is time to get ready.

It is time to worship.

It is time to watch and prepare.

It is time to be strong.

In Advent, we watch and prepare to welcome the Christ Child into the world.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!

ADVENT PRAYER FOR PEACE

God of Peace, you call us to prepare our hearts and entertain angels. You calm our spirits. You ask us to be alert, to wait, and to watch for the coming of glory. Help us receive your presence in our lives. Send your angels in the stillness of the night, and make us ready for the good news to come. Amen.

GLORIA PATRI

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son

And to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning

Is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, amen.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Prayer Hymn #263

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place,

I can feel his mighty power and his grace;

I can hear the brush of angels' wings,

I see glory on each face;

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

Silent Prayer

PASTORAL PRAYER – *audio available on the church website*

Rev. Mike Daly

God of Peace, you are the promise of the world...

Hear our prayers as we enter into Advent. It is a time of expectation and waiting. Lord, we hear your call to journey toward the light of divine truth, to be the light of love for others, and to let the light of others shine. And yet, even with our best efforts, too often we stumble and fall short. Our journey toward your promise of Christ's coming is filled with distractions, doubt, pain, and often despair.

Lord, we lift our voices to you asking humbly to bring strength and comfort to those who are ill and weary; and to bring healing and reconciliation to the lost and the divided. Celebrate with us the joy of baptisms and remind us of our own baptismal waters. Let your Holy Spirit reign over us once again.

Help us know that there is deep meaning in our waiting. Help us find meaning in our losses and our worries. Overtake us and envelop us in your shalom - so much so that our fears melt away, and we are move from dwelling in darkness to living in light.

Create in us a new thread that is peaceful and loving. Implant in us a desire that pulls us forward and moves us from promise to the miracle of new life. Create in us joyful hearts so that our journey is no longer weary but filled with love, energy, and adventure. Through Christ, the Prince of Peace and our Savior. Amen.

OUR LORD’S PRAYER – *audio available on the website* Michelle Maiers, vocals

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 sins, as we forgive those who sin 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.

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE – *audio available on the church website* Martha Mendoza

SCRIPTURE – *audio available on the church website* Fritz Baumgartner

Isaiah 11: 1-10

The Message (MSG) Translation by Eugene Peterson

A Green Shoot from Jesse’s Stump

A green Shoot will sprout from Jesse’s stump,
from his roots a budding Branch.

The life-giving Spirit of GOD will hover over him,
the Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit that gives direction and builds strength,
the Spirit that instills knowledge and Fear-of-GOD.

Fear-of-GOD

will be all his joy and delight.

He won’t judge by appearances,
won’t decide on the basis of hearsay.

He'll judge the needy by what is right,
render decisions on earth's poor with justice.
His words will bring everyone to awed attention.
A mere breath from his lips will topple the wicked.
Each morning he'll pull on sturdy work clothes and boots,
and build righteousness and faithfulness in the land.

A Living Knowledge of God

The wolf will romp with the lamb,
the leopard sleep with the kid.
Calf and lion will eat from the same trough,
and a little child will tend them.
Cow and bear will graze the same pasture,
their calves and cubs grow up together,
and the lion eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child will crawl over rattlesnake dens,
the toddler stick his hand down the hole of a serpent.
Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill
on my holy mountain.
The whole earth will be brimming with
knowing God-Alive,
a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.
On that day, Jesse's Root will be raised high, posted as a rallying banner for the
peoples. The nations will all come to him. His headquarters will be glorious.

SERMON – *audio available on the church website*

Rev. Mike Daly

SHALOM

In Advent, we watch and prepare to welcome the Christ child into the world. We center on four Advent themes; Peace, Hope, Joy, and Love. More than themes, peace-hope-joy-love, are how we want to live in the world. The connection and harmony of peace-hope-joy-love creates shalom. Welcome to Advent, everyone.

The only time I have been to the state of Washington was not too long after Mount St. Helen erupted. You may recall if you are old enough that a powerful volcano blew apart Mount St. Helen and leveled the surrounding area for miles and miles. Flattened trees covered in gray ash made the place look like the moon. I'll never forget the devastation of this natural disaster. I can still picture the landscape of destruction by the absence of anything standing or green.

In Isaiah's 10th chapter, just before today's reading, the prophet describes Israel's situation as one of devastation where all the trees have been clear-cut so that only stumps remain. The stumps appear to offer nothing, especially life and hope. This dead landscape is a symbol of a "dead" future.

This text may have been written anywhere from the eighth century to the sixth century BCE. It was a time when the political situation of the people of Israel was dire. There were constant and severe threats – first from the Assyrians and later by the Babylonian Empire. Dictatorial powers had taken over. Day to day life was dangerous and in disarray. Hopes for a peaceful future were doubtful.

Just as things appear to be most hopeless - just as the future looks most bleak, the prophet Isaiah makes a promise. The promise is that God is sending a leader. A leader who will rule with justice for all. A leader who will show mercy and compassion, especially toward the most vulnerable.

Children, the poor, the outcast, everyone will be cared for and protected. Isaiah says, "His words will bring everyone to awed attention. A mere breath from his lips will topple the wicked." Isaiah reminds the people that life and power comes from goodness, not from greed. It's no wonder the church has used this lectionary passage to herald the coming of Christmas and its message of peace.

The promises are shocking and perhaps even pure fantasy. The natural order of things will be overturned. Nature's predators (the wolf, the lion, the bear) will no longer be fearful creatures. Instead, they will be as gentle as the prey they once stalked.

Isaiah says to expect a ruler that will change the rules of life. Power will be bent in the direction of gentleness and peace -and this will not be just any peace, but shalom. "Shalom," is what Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says, "is creation time, when all of God's creation eases up on hostility and destruction and finds another way of relating (Peace). Things are going to go back to the way they were originally created – to the way things were meant to be. This poem is about the impossible possibility of the new creation!" (*Westminster Bible Companion*)

Kathryn Matthews says, "We are told that the old practice of the big ones eating the little ones is not the wave of the future, and we can actually look forward to a detoxified world, including nature itself that will be safe for the vulnerable." (*UCC, Feed Your Spirit*)

These are hopeful images of peace for the Advent season. Can a "new normal" actually become a reality? Is a very different world possible? It's become normal to hear about the shootings and death toll in places like Chicago. It's become normal to run a gauntlet of security and safety checkpoints just to board an airplane. It's become normal to listen to misleading or toxic rhetoric – political and social - at every turn. Everything we know is so "normal" we have gotten used to it. We have forgotten that we are - children of God who have been *promised* better than this.

Achieving a new normal is the vision that sustained our ancestors in faith. It is the same vision that sustains and encourages us. We long to make the message of Advent and Christmas a reality. Imagine a world, says Isaiah, so completely transformed that wolves and lambs can live together, along with leopards and goat kids, and calves and lions, cows and bears, lions and oxen, and little children and snakes--and a child shall lead them.

No doubt, it is hard to hope for that kind of vision. The practical-minded part of us will scoff at the possibility that carnivores and herbivores will live together in peace. As Woody Allen once commented, "The lion and the lamb may lay down together...but the lamb is not going to get much sleep."

But each year, as we approach Christmas, the Advent scriptures remind us of God's promise of a peaceable kingdom. They remind us that we are charged to do the work of justice to make peace possible. We are charged to do the work of healing so all broken relationships are restored. We are charged to do the work of love so enemies can live with each other redeemed.

Our leader is on the way - that is our promise! It is worth waiting for. But it is not His work alone. Until such time, what gets and keeps us ready? Faith.

A Quaker painter named Edward Hicks painted over eighty versions of the Peaceable Kingdom. Artwork that displays today's text, the animals at peace led by a child. People who study these great paintings will tell you that Edward Hicks started to depict the predators as being more and more fierce and ferocious over the years. Each new painting of the miracle looks harder and harder. He kept painting the vision, but at the end of his life, he confessed that he wasn't satisfied with his work. He confessed that it was hard to get it right.

Edward Hicks wasn't wrong. It is hard to trust ourselves to this vision when so many adversaries are so deadly. But, like Hicks, we never stop trying and believing.

On Christmas Day in 1863, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a poem that became the song we know as: "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." He wrote it at a time when the Civil War was at its bloodiest. A time in history when it was very easy to doubt that any kind of universal peace could be possible. A time to dismiss the kind of peace Isaiah preached as nothing more than a pure fairytale and wishful thinking. But Longfellow writes his poem to remind us that nothing can hold God back from completing what God intends to do despite the hate, fear, and violence that fills our world.

Longfellow wrote:

And in despair, I bowed my head:
'There is no peace on earth,' I said,
'For hate is strong and mocks the song,
Of Peace on earth, goodwill to men.'

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep;
'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With Peace on earth, goodwill to men'.

Let our Advent prayer be that we have such faith in waiting. That what is wrong will fail, and what is right will prevail. And at last, peace on earth and goodwill to all. It might not be an easy thing to believe. But we have God's word on it.

Shalom and Amen

OFFERTORY – *audio available on the church website*

*In response to the promise of God's love, let us give thanks through
the presentation of our gifts and offerings.*

O Come, O Come Emmanuel
Meg McGarry, soloist

DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Gracious God, accept our gifts – of time, talent, and treasure - as evidence of our desire to participate with you in the care of your beloved creation. These gifts symbolize our thanksgiving for all that you provide. Through these gifts, we praise you. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN – *audio available on the church website*

Meg McGarry, vocals

#132 When God is a Child

Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.

Refrain:

When God is a child
there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first
and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.

Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,
giving a promise of safety and worth. (Refrain)

Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,
telling the world that the Savior is born. (Refrain)

Love is a flame that burns in our heart.
Jesus has come and will never depart. (Refrain)

BENEDICTION

Go forth and be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Render no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted. Honor all people. Love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you, amen.