

Perley Lutheran Parish
December 20, 2020
4th Sunday in Advent



Opening Hymn – It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

It came upon a midnight clear
That glorious song of old
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold

Peace on the earth, good will to men
From heaven's all gracious King
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing

Welcome and Announcements

Invocation

P In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

P You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant:

C 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations

P I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.

C He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'

P And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

C My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him."

Lighting of the Advent Wreath



P: Duringm Advent we see God's love for us embodieed in our Savior's birth

C: Christ is our light and the sourve of everlasting love

P: Advent calls us to love others with patience and kindness

C: Christ is our light and the sourve of everlasting love

P: Advent calls us to be slow to anger and quick to forgive

C: Christ is our light and the sourve of everlasting love

P: Advent reminds us that Christ commanded us to love as he loved.

C: Christ is our light and the sourve of everlasting love

This morning we light four candles, the candles of hope, peace, joy and today's candle – love.

This candle reminds us that God so loved the world that he sent his only son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have life everlasting. Today we celebrate God's gift of love and remember that we have been commanded to love others as God loves us.

Confession and Absolution

P Let us confess our sins to God and ask his forgiveness.

C Almighty God, we have sinned against you in our thoughts, words and actions. We seek to satisfy our own needs instead of serving others in love. We turn from listening to your Word to listen to the tempting voices of the world. Have mercy on us and forgive us. Help us to walk in your ways.

P God has had mercy on us. He sent his only Son, the firstborn son of Mary, to be our Savior. Jesus our Savior died on the cross and rose from the dead to bring us forgiveness and life. I announce to you that your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

C To us a child is born, to us a son is given!

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God and Father, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of your Son, fill us with your peace, peace that we cannot find on our own, peace that the world cannot give to us. Help us by your Spirit to live in love and service to others and to be bold witnesses for our Savior so that others will come to know and worship Jesus as Lord. Hear our prayers and accept our praise in his name. Amen.

Children's Christmas Program

Gospel Reading, John 3:14-17

P And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Message: Her Firstborn Son

Were Adam and Eve proud of their firstborn son, Cain? Perhaps not later in life, but surely they were proud when he was born, proud and grateful to God. At Cain's birth, Eve said, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Genesis 4:1). She may have thought that this—already!—was the child that God promised to send, the child of the woman who would destroy the tempting serpent. Perhaps this was the child who would undo the terrible damage done in Eden, the child who would restore what was lost. But the time for that child of promise had not yet come.

Those first parents may have had high hopes for their firstborn son, but those hopes would not be fulfilled. Instead of destroying the tempting serpent, Cain, like his parents before him, fell to the serpent's power. Cain grew jealous of his younger brother Abel because the Lord received Abel's offering, but not Cain's, with favor. Cain acted out of his jealous anger and murdered his brother. As Adam and Eve had been sent out of Eden, so the Lord sent Cain away from his home.

Generations later, another child of promise appeared. This was the son promised to Abraham and Sarah, parents too old to have children. But the Lord fulfilled his promise and the son was born. The child was named Isaac, a name that means “he laughs,” a reminder that his parents had laughed at the promise of his birth to such an elderly couple, only to laugh with joy and delight at his birth. Yet once again it appeared that the story of this firstborn son was not going to turn out well either.

God commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac, his only son, as a sacrifice. So, trusting in the promise, trusting a God who could even raise up the dead, Abraham obeyed the Lord’s command. Isaac went along willingly, believing what his father Abraham told him: “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” The God who demanded a sacrifice would supply that sacrifice. As Abraham took up the knife to kill his son, an angel called out to stop him. God provided a ram for Abraham to offer up instead of his son. On that mountaintop place of death, God provided a sacrifice.

There are some researchers who make much of birth order, suggesting that the order of birth—firstborn, middle child, youngest child—determines the personality and behavior of a child. Whether we agree or not, one does not have to find a special place in the family birth order to receive the stain of sin passed down from Adam and Eve. Sons and daughters of our first parents, like Cain, we too bear that stain, and like Cain, we express our sin in our thoughts, words and actions. No, we may not physically go to the level that they did back them – we don’t go around taking the lives of those we don’t like. Scripture leaves no doubt about our sin and we really do have more in common with Cain than we would like to admit. We too grow jealous of what others have or are, of others who have what we think we deserve. Firstborn or not, sin stains our lives. Cain did not live up to the expectations of Adam and Eve. We do not, we cannot, live up to our heavenly Father’s expectations, for as Jesus said, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). The penalty for anything less than perfection—as Adam and Eve learned so long before in the garden—is death.

Yet just as he did for Abraham and Isaac, the Lord does for us. What God demands - he provides. He demands perfection and he provided a perfect son, his only Son: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” God offered up his only Son as a sacrifice in our place, for our sins. God kept the promise he had made to Adam and Eve, that a child of the woman would come to crush the power of the tempting serpent. God kept his promise to Abraham, that out of the nation formed of his descendants would come a blessing to every nation, to every family on earth. When the time was right, God sent his perfect Son, born of a woman, Mary of Nazareth. God’s only Son was Mary’s firstborn son, born in Bethlehem. She wrapped her precious son in swaddling

cloths and laid him in a manger.

When he was grown, this firstborn son of Mary would be offered up as a sacrifice on the altar of a cross. Like his ancestor Isaac, he too would carry the wood for the offering, in this case a cross, to the place of death. He would humbly submit to his Father's will, as Isaac did, because it was his Father's will that he should die for the sins of the world. This time, no angel would intervene. For Isaac, God stepped in to stop the sacrifice. From his only Son, God turned away as Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

So long before in Eden, God had decreed the penalty of death for all who sinned and rebelled against him, from Adam and Eve and Cain, all the way down to our day and beyond. But what God demanded, he provided. He provided the lamb of sacrifice, the lamb born in a stable in Bethlehem. Jesus, the perfect, innocent Son of God, carried our sins in his own body to the tree of the cross, and there he endured the penalty of death that we earned for ourselves. On that mountaintop place of death, a hill we call Mount Calvary, God provided a sacrifice.

Jesus was taken down from the cross and buried. But as Abraham had believed so long before, this is a God who raises the dead. On the third day, on the first Easter morning, Jesus rose from the dead, victorious over sin and death, victorious over that tempting serpent. God exalted him, raising him to his right hand, giving him all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. On the Last Day when Jesus returns, we who trust in him will be raised up bodily from our graves to share his glory and live in his presence forever. Abraham trusted the promises of God, and so do we, for we have his promise in Scripture: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:28-29). The Lord provides and he provided for us exactly what we needed, a lamb of sacrifice. Through faith in Jesus Christ, through Baptism, we are born again as God's sons and daughters. We have an inheritance in heaven, an inheritance that was won for us by the firstborn Son of Mary and Son of God. That precious firstborn Son, born in a stable in Bethlehem, is God's own Son and Mary's firstborn, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, who takes away our sin. Amen.

Prayers (Jesus, son of Mary and Son of God, **hear our prayer and accept our praise.**)

Jesus, Lamb of God, with your humble birth, your perfect life and your death and res-

urrection, you fulfilled the promises of God. You were offered up as the lamb of sacrifice for the sake of our salvation. Jesus, son of Mary and Son of God, **hear our prayer and accept our praise.**

Jesus, Lamb of God, we pray that you would work through us to comfort people who are ill or fearful, those who doubt and those who are trapped in the darkness of sin. Give us opportunities to serve them in love and share with them the good news of salvation. Jesus, son of Mary and Son of God, **hear our prayer and accept our praise.**

Jesus, Lamb of God, you are the firstborn from the dead, and we will follow you into eternal life. We look forward to your Second Advent, that glorious day when you will raise us up from our graves as you were raised. We will live in your presence for all eternity, praising you then as we praise you now. Jesus, son of Mary and Son of God, **hear our prayer and accept our praise.**

Jesus, Lamb of God, even when we walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve us, deliver us, and fulfill your purpose for us. According to your steadfast love, grant healing and wholeness to those who are mourning as they deal with tremendous loss, we ask that you continue to send healing to those dealing with illness and recovery. We lift up those within our congregation and those that have reached out to us for prayers, Jeff, Kirk, Brent, Paxley, Vern, Veronica, Lisa, Kaylee and TeAnna and all of those that we now name silently in our own hearts. Jesus, son of Mary and Son of God, **hear our prayer and accept our praise.**

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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. In the name of the Father and of the +Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Closing Hymn – The First Noel

The first Noel the angels did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay:
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep

On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel born is the King of Israel.

Dismissal: Go in peace, prepare the way of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Mark Your Calendars:

Wednesday, December 23rd – Last Advent Devotion @ 7PM Live Stream on Facebook.

Thursday, December 24th – Candlelight Christmas Eve Service at 7pm

Sunday, December 27th – No Service

Service adapted from *In those Days Advent Series* written by Carol Geisler. © 2018
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