

12.25.22 – 1st Sunday in Christmastide

“The Child is Here!”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 148:1-6, 13-14 (NIV) ~ Pam

¹ Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights above.

² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars.

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.

⁵ Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for at his command they were created,

⁶ and he established them for ever and ever—
he issued a decree that will never pass away.

¹³ Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

¹⁴ And he has raised up for his people a horn,
the praise of all his faithful servants,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

L: These are Messianic Words of Celebration! All: Thanks be to God!

Luke 2:15-20 (NRSVue)

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, ¹⁹ and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

Leader: These are Amazing Words from God. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Father God, finally, the Christ child is here! During Advent preparation, we asked you to help us empty our hearts and minds so that we would be ready to receive your perfect love in the form of the baby Jesus. Being Christmas morning, our hearts and minds may be too full of family preparations or the commercial holiday traditions, so please help us to focus anew and hear a word through your Scriptures and this message. Be with those who cannot be here and speak now through this messenger’s voice. Amen.

Merry Christmas Day! Thank you to our many helpers over the last several weeks and especially yesterday to our worship leaders, greeters, poinsettia handlers, guests, and musicians who brought about such a meaningful service and season. The Christ Child is Here! Hallelujah!

And so should we praise the Lord for the mighty things he has done: “¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16 ^{NIV}).” We will observe communion next Sunday, January 1st, as we memorialize that he came to be with us on earth, and eventually die on the cross for our sins. The Psalmist of course did not know these things but praises the natural evidence of God’s glory on earth anyway: trees, mountains, clouds, and stars. He prophecies about the transcendent Lord, the horn of salvation to come. And here we are.

Last night, we heard again the Christmas stories of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph as they each learned of two miraculous births to come, John and Jesus. As we have been preparing ourselves by emptying, Mary was preparing for her new role as virgin mother. The Lord sent an angel to her to explain, and her cousin Elizabeth proclaimed her “blessed among all women.” By the time Mary and Joseph had gone to Bethlehem to register their citizenship, as was required, she had had the time to consider her future life and was not as surprised as the shepherds had been when they heard the news. At first, like the other angelic messengers, it was one angel who delivered the news to the shepherds: “¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Luke 2:11-12 ^{KJV}).” But then, a

multitude of heavenly hosts appeared praising God for this news: “¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” The bright light and countenance must have been a frightening supernatural event, but the angels were not there to deliver judgment or punishment, as the shepherds must have feared. They delivered the greatest news of all! So, they obeyed and went in search of the newborn baby who would be called Messiah. The shepherds found the little family in a humble stall at the inn because no guest room was available.

So much was happening that you can imagine the chaos in the middle of ordinary life when angels appeared: Zechariah was performing his normal duties in the temple, Mary was going about her life contemplatively, Joseph was sleeping, and the shepherds were feeding and caring for their flock of sheep out in the fields. We are in the middle of an ordinary Sunday worship, yet it’s Christmas! How does your house look on Christmas Day? Ha!

These circumstances in Scripture seem disorganized and confusing . . . But. . . for. . . God! In any crisis or even a positive chaotic situation, when we step back to take a breath, we can see that God’s plan was quite simple, really. If we have emptied ourselves like Mary did during her travel to Bethlehem contemplating her role and God’s amazing love, we should be ready to receive even the supernatural experience or a miracle! Like Mary who pondered these things in her heart, can **we** meditate on how all things came together to bring us to today? With any Christmas Eve service, it takes collaboration to bring together Scripture, story, music, ritual, communion, and candlelight, and to be honest, it is a bit messy the weeks beforehand, planning how to be different from yet like

the years before, carrying on traditions. Here is a look behind the proverbial OZ curtain: there are multiple priorities of faith renewal, evangelism, new faith invitations, hospitality, promotion, beauty, awe, how to inspire, how to welcome new people, celebrate and affirm our talented musicians, facilitate guest vocalists and instrumentalists, observe Holy Communion in a meaningful way, safely light and extinguish candles, all the while conveying the simple story of Jesus' birth.

Now, at your homes, if I were to itemize all you did to bring this day to fruition (plan, invite, shop, wrap, prep, and welcome-an abbreviated list), you would be exhausted just remembering it all! It is anything but an ordinary day or season; it is complex, but we are happy, because those are the things we do to celebrate such an extraordinary occasion. The purpose of celebrating today is not economic or commercial; it was and is simple: God chose sacrificially to become present with his people on earth, through his son, Jesus. That is a heart move as well as Mary's was. The prophesied child leader has arrived, and that is a weighty responsibility to raise the Lord, the Messiah, and the Savior. Mary would have been overwhelmed but for God's help and guidance; her faith was strong! She led with her heart, not her mind, as should we in most relational and spiritual endeavors. This is where God dwells. We cleared minds and hearts this season to make room for the fullness of God and his love provided through Jesus this day. We must now incorporate what we've learned and heard God say this year as we move into the next year of Divine Experiments.

Yes, there was ordinary excitement over the news of a child, but an unusual understanding that this child was extraordinary and would save

us all from sin and evil, teaching us how to be gracious and merciful to others. Yes, the Christ child is here! So, what's next? I imagine that Mary asked herself that same question. What's next? How about you, as we enter a new year? Ponder God's message for you; what work does he have for us as a church; how can we continue outreach to the community in a more engaging and meaningful way? How can we celebrate this transformative day every day of the year? “¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward” all people. Amen! ||

Will you pray with me? God of love and merciful grace, thank you for these words to remind us that *Emmanuel* is why we are here today. May our joy and awareness of the Messiah grow and daily demonstrate to the world your love for humanity. Bring transformational salvation into our lives, the church, and the world. We thank you for this season to ponder your love; may it continue in our hearts every day. **Amen.**