

Worship with McClure United Church

~ 4th Sunday in Advent ~

December 20, 2020

Welcome & Announcements

Christmas Eve

Please join us for one (or all) of our online Christmas Eve services on December 24th:

- 5pm - Virtual Pageant
- 7pm - Lessons & Carols
- 9pm - Zoom Communion

Connection links will be provided the week prior to Christmas Eve.

The 5PM and 7PM lessons will be recorded and available for later viewing on YouTube and Facebook.

Christmas Eve Donations

It has been our tradition over the last few years at McClure Christmas Eve services, to collect church offerings and pass them on to needy agencies. This year we hope to continue this practise even though we won't be meeting together in person. We have again chosen The Saskatoon Food Bank and Friendship Inn to receive these gifts.

If you would like to donate a gift for Christmas Eve this is how to do it during these Covid times. Please write "Christmas Eve Donation " on the cheque or e-transfer. The donations can be dropped off in the mailbox outside, the mailbox inside by the office door or e-transfers, that are automatically deposited using the email address in the announcements.

Thank you for caring for your community and for being the church.

There will be worship Sunday Dec 27th

Pastoral Emergency over Christmas

It has been the tradition to give the Ministry staff the week between Christmas and New Year as a time to rest and renew. This year all staff will be taking time to care for themselves and their families. The phone will be checked daily and Debra will be responding to all emergencies. Debra can be reached at 306-382-2566.

Zoom Connections

Friday mornings at 10AM.

We will take a break this week for Christmas and the week for New Years. We will meet again January 8th, to share information, discuss issues and connect with each other via Zoom.

For more information, please visit our website or contact Laura at (306) 291-5838 or by email at laura@mcclureunitedchurch.org .

Christmas Cookie Sale

Thanks to Ebba Eggleston, Marlene Kells and Dorothy Booker - Tymchatyn for organizing the recent Baked Goodie Event. For all those who participated there were trays overflowing with Christmas yummys from tarts to truffles and ginger snaps to shortbread. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the feast and to all those who purchased a tray.

Outreach Update

Thank you to all who supported our EGADZ collection. The staff was excited to receive our 16 boxes. The many donations are being tallied and one cheque will be sent from the Church. EGADZ will be our hands reaching into the community to support these vulnerable youth.

A big McClure Thank you to Carol Claypool and Mary Jane Waugh, who have provided leadership during our projects to help out Socks for the Homeless and EGADZ. These two women have led us through collecting, organizing and delivering! Well done and thank you!

Last Day for 2020 Contributions

Contributions for 2020 (to appear on 2020 tax receipts) must be in by 5PM on Monday, December 28. Donations may be dropped off in the mailbox outside the church, mailed to the church (they must be RECEIVED by the 28th at 5PM, not postmarked), or e-transferred by the 28th. Donations made via the Canadahelps website may be made right up until midnight on December 31st.

Advent Prayer Tree

We have our very own Advent Prayer Tree (right in front of the main doors of the church building). We are inviting everyone to write your prayer requests on fabric strips and tie them to the tree - or simply tie a piece of fabric as a symbolic gesture of offering your prayer. When you stop by to tie your fabric, pause for a moment to share your prayer and offer a prayer for this community as we travel this Advent journey of hope, peace, joy and love. Thanks to Doug Coley for making this tree for us!

Opening Prayer/Call to Worship

O God, today on this Advent Sunday as we have now light the Advent candle of love...

We pray you will open our hearts....

may we trust in your abundant love for us... feeling it surround us now, holding us tight.

We pray you will open our bodies....

may we be really present to your love now so that each breath we take will fill our hearts.

We pray you will open our spirits ...

May your love inspire our love so that together we can live your dream of love into being.

Amen..

Scripture

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Reflection

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

In the lesson Colleen read for us we hear the Angel speaking important news to the young Mary, "³⁰The angel says to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Later in the story we hear the Angel once again speaking words, we know by heart - proclaimed at every Christmas pageant ever done but speaking this time to the shepherd in the field. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy".

One of my favorite Christmas pageant stories is about the young boy who was given a very important role in the church Christmas play. He was to be the angel and announce the birth of Jesus. For weeks he rehearsed

the line that had been given to him, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy."

The grandparents got in on it and any time the family was together, and the boy was there, they would encourage him to rehearse his line for them. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." They were certain that when he grew up, he would be a famous actor because of his dramatic ability.

The great night came for the Christmas pageant and everybody was in place. All the grandparents and extended family were there. Visitors had come in and all the children were in costumes, complete with bathrobes for shepherds and fake wings and halos for the angels.

As the pageant started, the excitement was electric around the room. //The dramatic beginning to the evening was the announcement by the angel, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." The spotlight hit the young boy and as he stood center stage in the middle of all this excitement, his brain froze. Every grandparent, aunt, uncle and neighbor came to the edge of their seats, wanting to say it for him. You could see them in unison, mouthing, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy."

Still, his brain was frozen; he couldn't say it. He tried it, but it just wouldn't come. So, finally, in a heroic moment he filled his lungs with breath and blurted out the words, "Have I got news for you!"//

To be honest I like this young boy's interpretation – I think he got it just right – especially this year. Because this year the world needs Christmas. I like that frivolous song, "We need a little Christmas, we need a little Christmas now." The church needs to change that line in Scripture from "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy" to "Have we got news for you!"

For if there is a time we can push back the sorrow of this world, if there is a time that we can put aside the clouds of sadness that roll in our heads, if there is a time we can pierce through the evening news and get a glimpse of hope, it is now with this good news of Christmas.

When we open the paper or pull out our phones to read the news of the week, we wonder, "Where on earth is God in all of this chaos?" Well according to the good news of Christmas - God is right here in the middle of the mess with us. Just as God is in the middle of the mess with Mary. //The first thing the angel, Gabriel, says to Mary is "The Lord is with you." And then he says, "Do not be afraid." Gabriel assured Mary that God was with her.

Madeleine L 'Engle describes the birth of Christ in a messy world in a way that wows me every time I hear it:

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till people and nations were at peace.

He came when the Heavens were unsteady, and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time. He came when the need was deep and great. In the mystery of the Word made Flesh the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice,

for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Year after year we gather to hear the story of Jesus' birth - even when all the world is not sane. We raise our songs throughout Advent with joyful voices because although we know sorrow and despair and uncertainty, Love has been birthed into the messiness of our world, right into the middle of it.

So, if it seems hard to live into the joy of Christmas this year because of the heavy burdens you bear, or the messiness of your life or your family, or the pain of being physically distanced from those you love know this: God does not wait. God does not wait until the world is ready, or for a perfect time, or for perfect peace. God does not wait for pandemics to end. God does not wait for all the messes to be tidied up. God does not wait because "Jesus is being born where people need him most." God makes God's home in the messiest of places—a stable—in the messiest of times— under the control of the Roman Empire—and with the most ordinary of people—a teenage girl and her fiancé and the shepherds. Jesus is being born where we need him most. In the messes. In the hard places. In the dark and desperate places. In the lonely and lost places. In the places, and with the people, who seem too far gone. Jesus is born into exactly those kinds of places and he spends his life with the most vulnerable and ostracized and broken hearted of people. And it is through the birth of this child into the mess of first-century Bethlehem and into the mess of our 2020 world that **we** must proclaim: As the little boy said, "Have we got news for you!"

Love is stronger than death, that there are no through away people, there is nothing that can separate us from God and forgiveness is ours. That loving our neighbour can change everything and peace with justice is possible. ////

Let me tell you another story. Once upon a time - Two artists were commissioned to paint their conception of peace. A panel of distinguished judges would determine which artist had best captured the idea. The winner would get a rich commission. And after they had been painting for a long time, the judges assembled to view their work.

The first artist unveiled his painting, and there was a beautiful, magnificent pastoral scene, with a farmer coming in after a hard day in the fields. His wife was cooking, his children were playing around the hearth, and all was at peace in this tranquil and beautiful farm.

"That's it," said the judges, "but we'll look at the other rendering anyway." They removed the veil of the second painting. Instead of a tranquil, pastoral scene, there was a raging waterfall producing a mist which communicated hostility. But over on the side of the waterfall was a tiny branch of a tree growing out of a rock, and on the end of the branch was a bird's nest. And on the edge of the nest was a mother bird, singing her heart out in the midst of the turbulence around her. The judges thought for a moment, then said, "This is peace, tranquility and celebration in the midst of turmoil."

Today, despite the messes that surround us and the pain we feel, we know that God has become one of us and is in the middle of the mess with us—face mask and all. And so, we raise our songs with joyful voice, for Love has come and continues to break through. And for this, we say, thanks be to God. Love has come...

Hey world,

Have we, the followers of Jesus, got news for you!

Love has come. Love has come and we are determined to live that love in this world

Amen.

Prayers of the People/Lord's Prayer

Dreaming God... in this time of prayer may we open our hearts and minds to your dreams for us.. for our communities... and for the world.

May we connect our own dreams with yours so that together we can live into being your vision for the world.

Now we pray our dreams for a world filled with love... a world that has been waiting in darkness. We have been waiting; we have been preparing... and now with hope-filled gratitude we are ready to celebrate once again your light coming to us... a light that shines your love on us, in us and through us.

Already knowing the abundance of your love, we open our hearts and pause now to allow your love to flow through us and into the world, as we offer our prayers.

We pray with dreams for a better world where everyone has a roof over their heads, clothes on their backs and enough food to satisfy their hunger. We pray for a world where everyone is able to be safe and secure, where they can close their eyes and have a restful sleep, not worrying about what the morning will bring.

As we dream of these things, help us to do our best to bring them to life.

There is so much to do that has been left undone. Give us the courage to step out in faith to make your dreams and ours a reality.

We offer our prayers for all the elected officials who form our governments. May they witness your dreams too... dreams of a world of compassion where greed is set aside for the sake of those on the margins, those who are oppressed, those who are ignored, left out and abused. And help us to be bold in our faith as we stand up for what is right and just.

We hold in prayer now those who are sick, who are grieving, who are lonely, afraid, anxious. Touch them with your healing Spirit that they may also be filled with the peace that comes with your dreams for them, for their loved ones and for your world.

Holy God, may we not hold onto our dreams as if they will be easily shattered but may we be given the courage, strength and wisdom to live our dreams faithfully, boldly and without apology... knowing that our dreams for a better world for ourselves and all your people come from you, connect us to you and help us prepare the way for greater love.

And now we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught... Our Father

Blessing

Friends our advent journey is almost complete:

The gifts of hope, peace, joy and love that we have reflected on during this season are with us always.

As we go into the world today, we take these gifts with us, treasures to hold in our hearts and to offer one another and the world.

Hey world have we got news for you.

And may the grace of Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem, the love of our God and the companionship of the Holy Spirit move with us this day and every day.

Amen.