



FAIRLAWN

Connect with what matters in life.

Hope Peace Joy Love



**Fairlawn Avenue United Church
Sunday, December 24, 2023 10:30am
Fourth Sunday of Advent**

Rev. Jean Ward
Rev. Dr. Cameron Watts
Eleanor Daley, Director of Music
Fairlawn Avenue Senior Choir

2.

Gathering Words

***Processional Carol** Hark! the Herald Angels

VU #48

*Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new born King,
peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies;
with th' angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"*

*Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail th' incarnate deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"*

*Hail, the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail, the Son of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"*

Gathering Prayer We Suspect Angels

Eternal God,
in the long ago days
when the earth was flat,
and heaven was above the clouds,
and disease was caused by demons,
your Son was born
to lighten all our darknesses.

We now, after the Enlightenment,
are in bondage to different limitations.

We doubt what we cannot prove;
we ignore what we cannot see,
and finding little room for faith,
we must confess,

***We suspect angels
and disbelieve good news.***

We admit ourselves
to be both infected and affected
by the spirit of our times.

Behind talk of world peace,
we hear the machinery of war;
beneath talk of global equality
we detect the posturing of the powerful;
beside talk of your Church being renewed,
we recognize the bondage to failed patterns of the past.

Rather than embrace the light,
we become fascinated by darkness,
and must confess,

***We suspect angels
and disbelieve good news.***

Ah, God,
who will save us?

Our cynicism is the fruit of our experience,
not the key to the future.
Our suspiciousness helps us to smell the rat,
never to recognize the dove.

Our perfect analysis may describe the mountain,
but is helpless to move it.

It is with little pride we must confess:

***We suspect angels
and disbelieve good news.***

As Christmas approaches,
give us a share of that divine naiveté
enjoyed by Elizabeth and Zechariah,
Mary and Joseph,
and unnamed country folk,
who encountered angels,
and believed the Good News
and recognized Christ among them.

Amen.

Sharing Peace

Sometimes we fear the light, even as we long for it.
 Sometimes we fear that the light of Christ's appearing
 will expose us for who and what we are.

Let us see in the candle flames
 the warmth of God's love,
 not the heat of God's anger.

Let us rid ourselves
 of all that we need carry no longer.

***In this waiting time, almost but not yet,
 we prepare to welcome the child
 into the truth of our lives.***

***Within this community -
 this gathering of fellow travelers and friends -
 we offer our mis-steps and our mistakes,
 our evasions, our excuses, our self doubt,
 and we await the peace of your forgiveness,
 the gift of other chances,
 the bliss of Holy knowing.***

Pause for Quiet Reflection.

Delight in us God.

***Be - and be in -
 our hope, our peace, our joy, our love,
 and our wonder.***

***Open our eyes to your presence,
 in us, and with us,
 renewing your Creation.***

***Help us to be
 who you call us to be. Amen.***

May the peace promised by God,
 lighted by a star,
 and incarnated in a child,
 sit with you this Christmas.

***May that peace be yours and ours.
 Amen.***

Scripture**Luke 1:26-45** (Common English Bible)

Reader: Mary Ellen Richardson

When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favoured one! The Lord is with you!"

She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honouring you. Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."

Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I haven't had sexual relations with a man?"

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son. Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled 'unable to conceive' is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God."

Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. She entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. With a loud voice she blurted out, "God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. Why do I have this honour, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfil the promises he made to her."

Anthem

Tomorrow Shall be My Dancing Day

John Gardner (1917-2011)

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day: I would my true love did so chance
To see the legend of my play, to call my true love to my dance;

*Sing O my love, O my love, my love, my love;
This have I done for my true love.*

Then was I born of a virgin pure, of her I took fleshly substance;
Thus was I knit to man's nature, To call my true love to my dance; R

In a manger laid and wrapped I was, so very poor this was my chance,
Betwixt an ox and a silly poor ass, to call my true love to my dance; R

Then afterwards baptized I was; the Holy Ghost on me did glance.
My Father's voice heard from above, to call my true love to my dance: R
(Traditional English)

Poem

The Visitation

Here is a meeting made of hidden joys
Of lightnings cloistered in a narrow place
From quiet hearts the sudden flame of praise
And in the womb the quickening kick of grace.
Two women on the very edge of things
Unnoticed and unknown to men of power
But in their flesh the hidden Spirit sings
And in their lives the buds of blessing flower.
And Mary stands with all we call 'too young',
Elizabeth with all called 'past their prime'
They sing today for all the great unsung
Women who turned eternity to time
Favoured of heaven, outcast on the earth
Prophets who bring the best in us to birth.
(Malcolm Guite)

Reflection

The Place of Caught Breath

Rev. Jean Ward

*Hymn

Love Came Down at Christmas

***Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.***

8.

***Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, love divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?***

***Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and neighbour,
Love for plea and gift and sign.***
(Christina Rossetti, 1830-1894, alt.)

Introduction of Offering

Offertory Anthem Mid-winter

Bob Chilcott (b. 1955)

In the bleak mid-winter,
frosty wind made moan;
earth stood hard as iron,
water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow,
snow on snow,
in the bleak mid-winter
long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him,
nor earth sustain,
heaven and earth shall flee away
when He comes to reign:
in the bleak mid-winter
a stable place sufficed
the Lord God Almighty
Jesus Christ.

Angels and Archangels
may have gathered there,
cherubim and seraphim
thronged the air;
but only His Mother
in her maiden bliss
worshipped the Belovèd
with a kiss.

What can I give Him,
 poor as I am?
 If I were a Shepherd
 I would bring a lamb;
 if I were a Wise Man
 I would do my part,
 yet what I can I give Him,
 give my heart.
 (Christina Rossetti, 1830-1894)

***Presentation of the Offering**

E. Daley

(The choir will sing through once, and then the congregation is invited to join in.)

***Come, Light of lights, come shine upon us,
 Come, touch our hearts, we long for you.
 Come, touch our lives, come and renew us,
 Come to us, Emmanuel.***

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

As children turn to a mother
 who watches over them,
 let us turn to God saying:

***Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed by 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.
 And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil;
 for thine is the kingdom,
 the power, and the glory
 forever and ever. Amen.***

***Recessional Hymn** Angels We Have Heard on High

***Angels we have heard on high
sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and the mountains in reply,
echoing their joyous strains.***

***Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Gloria in excelsis Deo!***

***Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
which inspire your heavenly song? R***

***Come to Bethlehem and see
Christ whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee
Christ, the Lord, the newborn King. R***

***See him in a manger laid,
whom the choirs of angels praise;
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,
while our hearts in love we raise. R***

***Advent Blessing**

Light looked down
and saw darkness.
"I will go there," said light.

Peace looked down
and saw war.
"I will go there," said peace.

Love looked down
and saw hatred.
"I will go there," said love.

So he,
 the Lord of Light,
 the Prince of Peace
 the King of Love
 came down
 and crept in
 beside us.

***Choral Commissioning**

E. Daley

(The choir will sing through once, and then the congregation is invited to join in.)

Redeemer, come! We open wide our hearts to you; here Lord, abide.

Let us your inner presence feel, your grace and love in us reveal.

(Georg Weisell 1642, trans. Catherine Winkworth 1855, alt.)

Postlude

Prayer and Blessing from *Cloth for the Cradle, worship resources and readings for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*. Copyright © 1999, Wild Goose Resource Group.

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Christmas Eve

at

Fairlawn



Sunday, Dec. 24 4:00pm Christmas Eve ~ Family Service

Sunday, Dec. 24 10:00pm Christmas Eve ~ Candlelight Communion Service



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Our offices and building will be closed
Monday, December 25, 2023 to January 1, 2024,
and re-open on Tuesday, January 2, 2024.

For emergency pastoral care during the holiday, please email:
pastoralcare@fairlawnavenueunited.ca



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