

November 29, 2020

Light of the World...First Sunday of Advent

Shepherd's Grace Church

The service will begin in as much darkness as we can create. All overhead lights will be off. The candles on the altar will be lit. Blinds will be closed. There will be a spotlight on the Christmas tree in the corner and on the Cross in the center of the sanctuary.

Youth will process in with a single unlit candle. Music for procession will be "O Come, O Come Emanuel".

Lighting the Advent Candle—Whoever volunteers will step to the altar and light the candle from the procession. That candle will then be taken to the advent wreath and the first candle of the season will be lit...the candle of peace.

After the candle is lit, all youth will read together: This is the first candle of Advent. The candle of Peace. As it burns in our sanctuary, its light burns in our hearts. Let this light grow. Peace be with you. Shalom!

Congregation will respond: And also with you. Shalom. All sing first verse of "O Come, O Come Emanuel."

Youth move to first row of chairs and sit.

Sharing Joys and Concerns—(Lights are turned on) Welcome all in the congregation and on Facebook Live.

Praise and Worship—We can sing Christmas Hymns, are there other Christmas type songs?

Opening Prayer:

Good morning, God! Today, we have come in darkness to see if the light of promise will grow in this place. We want to praise you and we want to honor you, but there is so much going on in our lives. Sometimes it does not seem like light. Sometimes it seems like only darkness, but then, in a single moment, we catch a glimpse. In a single moment we remember Christmas and we smile. Smile with us

today as we remember the past and look forward to the future. We know you are here! Smile with us and bless our lives in this season of Advent. This we pray through the power of Your Holy Spirit and in Jesus' name. Amen!

Children's Time:

During Children's time we will invite all the kids in the sanctuary to come up. Whoever is leading children's time will say, "Today we will place the Chrismon's on the tree. Many are already there, but we want to place these last ones on with you. What we put on the tree is special. These symbols were made by the women of our church in the very first year we were a church. Many of us older kids can remember when we sat where you sat. We can remember putting the decorations on the tree as the words of this poem were read. We probably didn't pay much attention to the words. We just wanted to get all the decorations on the tree. Today, the words are a little more important to us, but still, we want to get the stuff up on the tree. Today, we remember when we were you. Today we remember that pretty soon, you will be us. Watch and listen as we put the Chrismon's on the tree!"

The symbols will be on the Altar. All the youth will be gathered around the tree. As the reader reads the poem for each symbol, a youth will move to the altar and get that symbol and return and place it on the tree.

Presentation of Chrismon Symbols

The Angel—Now place we all the Angel, With heart and soul rejoice! Her song proclaims salvation in Heaven's joyous voice!

The Latin Cross—Now place we here the cross, An offering to the One. He comes into this world a king, God's one and only Son. His love he does not hide, His death saves us from sin. His life on earth a victory for those with faith in Him!

The Butterfly—We place here now the butterfly, a sign of our new life. Our ugliness in sin and death reclaimed by Jesus Christ. His resurrection story proclaims our fate complete. What once was ugly in our lives in Him is now so sweet!

The Dove—We place the dove to honor the Spirit of His love. We sing, we shout, we praise His name...our Savior from above!

The Alpha and Omega—We place this symbol so we know the glory of our King. He's first, he's last, he's in between...Hosanna now we sing!

The Fish—We place the fish upon our tree and in its presence see The command he gave us then and now...just come, follow me! We are to fish for others, this is His clear command, but he does not leave us work alone...He always takes our hand!

The Staff—The staff is our reminder, Our shepherd calls eternally. For you my life I did lay down...now come and follow Me!

The Crown—We place the crown upon our tree, before our King we bow. He is our Lord forever, in past and future and now!

The Star—The symbol of the star we hang, it is our guiding light. It leads to where the child-King lay on that most Holy Night!

HIS—This symbol in a circle, we place upon our tree. Blessing and Wisdom, and Honor we offer now to Thee! Thanksgiving, glory, power be unto him alone...All praise to our Lord Jesus who sits upon the throne!

The last symbol we will put on the tree is the “Key to the Season.” Whoever reads should read the story of the key from inside the box while a youth puts the key on the tree.

After all the symbols are on the tree, ask the kids to move to the altar. There, whoever volunteers to read will describe for the kids what is on the altar.

During the Advent season, we decorate our alter table differently from the rest of the year. The light is there, the cross is also present, however new objects have been added.

These objects are part of what is called the *creche*. (Kar-esh)

A creche traditionally includes two animals: an ox and a donkey. These were the two animals participating in the earliest creche because it was understood that the crèche would allude to Isaiah 1:3 which states "The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand."

Another important consideration is that the shepherds and the wise men shouldn't be at the creche together. This year, in an effort for us to learn more about patience and persistence, we will add the shepherd and the wise men as we continue to journey through the season of Advent. The manger will also be empty until Christmas day. The creche will stay up until after January 6, which is the celebration of Epiphany. Epiphany is the day of revelation.

Perhaps our scene on the altar will look a little bare for the first few days of Advent ... perhaps this will be a reminder of the world as it is before Jesus enters. In the fullness of time, God sent his Son. Until the Lord comes, we wait...and we watch...and we pray. O Come O Come Emanuel.

Invite the kids to pray with you.:

Dear God

Thank you for Christmas.

Thank you for sending Jesus

Thank you for His love.

Thank you for Advent

For when we wait and watch

Thank you for being God.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Scripture:

Isaiah 64:1-9

64O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—²as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! ³When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. ⁴From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. ⁵You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed.

⁶We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. ⁷There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. ⁸Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. ⁹Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

Prayer Hymn:

Pastoral Prayer:

Hey God, here we are, here we are in this first Sunday of Advent and we are just wanting to get to Christmas. It seems as if so much of our year has been interrupted and so much of our lives this year have been in what they are calling the "New Normal." We had to watch church on television or on our computers for the first part of the year. We spent Easter apart from our church family. We spent Mother's day alone and we had to say good bye to our school friends in the middle of the year. We waited a long time to see them and in the meantime, we missed graduations and parties and cheering at sport things and a whole lot of other stuff that we can't even remember right now.

But here we are. Here we are waiting for Christmas and hoping it will be similar to the Christmases of the past. We have such great memories and we want them to be part of what we remember this Christmas. Help us right now to look past all this strange "New Normal" stuff, to the stuff we remember and help us to trust in you that even though the rest of the world seems strange right now, you are still here and you are still reminding us that a long time ago, you sent your son to bring light to the world! Help us to remember that while things are different this year, things are different every year.

Help us to remember that years are different and that things do not happen in the same way every year, but that the traditions we have, the hanging of Chrismons, the decorating the Altar, the songs we sing are still and forever the same. Help us to know that in the middle of all this pandemic stuff and everything else that is changing, Christmas is still the same. It is the same celebration of a time when you bring light to the world. It is the same

celebration of a time when you keep your promises to us. It is the same celebration of peace and hope and love and joy that we have known and will always know because you are our God!

As we remember, today, we thank you. You have given us the same work to do. You have given us the same responsibilities; to share the gospel of Jesus, to feed the hungry; to provide for the homeless; to visit the sick. We might have to do these things a little differently, but who we are has not changed, because you have not changed. So, come to us this Advent season and help us once again to let Christmas come alive in us. Let the light of the world glow in us. Let it be seen by others.

While you use us in this way, let us see the way you use others. Let us remember that even in this time of service there are others serving you in different ways. Let us remember that some who serve you serve in different places and they find themselves completely cut off from friends and family as they do the work you are calling them to do. Some of them find themselves putting their lives on the line for liberty and freedom for us. Be with them today and let them know that we are with them today...that we remember! Keep them safe and return them home safely to you Lord!

When they return home, let us gather around them as we always have, and let us give you thanks for their safe return. Let us praise and honor your Name as we always have. But do not let our prayers stop with those who believe as we do. Instead, let us pray as you have taught us; as we always have! Let us pray

for others, for those who believe differently than we do. Let us pray for those who would speak against us, for those who would raise a hand or even point a weapon at us. Today, we pray for our enemies. Be with them and give them peace. Let them return to their families and friends and let them rejoice together at your presence.

Then, when the time is right, come to us. Call us out into the streets, out of our isolation and darkness and into the light. In that light of hope, lead us to a place that only you know. There, teach us to lay down our weapons and join our arms. Arm in arm, lead us out of the darkness and into the light. Lead us to the top of the mountain where we can sit together in peace and learn from you how to beat our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks. Today, let us sit in the light and share your peace with all people. Let this be our prayer; a prayer for peace and hope; a prayer for a “new normal” where our traditions and symbols remind us of your continued presence with us.

Here we are! Hear our prayer because we ask it through the power of Your Holy Spirit and in Jesus’ name. And now, we continue to pray together in the very words Jesus taught us a long time ago.

Lord’s Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven.....

Offering and Doxology:

Will the ushers come forward. (Need two ushers to receive the offering)

Let us pray for God's blessing on our gifts. Hey God, You have everything. We don't have much, but you have given us more than we need. Today we are giving back a little so you can use it for others who have less than we do. Bless our gifts and use them for the right things. This we pray through the power of Your Holy Spirit and in Jesus' name. Amen!

(After offering is taken, sing doxology)

Gospel Lesson:

Mark 13:24-37

²⁴“But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and

glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the

house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Message:

Wow! I’ve got to tell you, that passage from Isaiah...that really hit home with me this morning. Five hundred years before the coming of Christ, Isaiah wrote those words and they might as well have been written to me this morning. We could use the Lord coming down right about now, couldn’t we? I mean, 2020 has been a real struggle.

Don’t get me wrong, I know a lot of you have had struggles this year. Some people I know have been laid off from work. They do not know if they will get to go back. Some people I know have had family members who were sick. We still don’t know how they will recover or if they will recover fully or even if there will be some problems for them in the future.

Yeah, some of you have had some real problems, that is for sure. Maybe when you hear what I am thinking, you will think c’mon, man! But here it is! I am just a kid and I am missing out on the stuff kids get to do. I mean, last year there was spring break...well, it was kind of spring break but we knew when we left for break that we would not be coming back to school for the rest of the year!

The rest of the year! That’s like crazy! Who takes spring break and then just doesn’t come back? It has been really hard to wrap my head around that. And, it might have been ok except that the stuff I like to do when I am out of school...well, they told me I couldn’t do that either. Now, I don’t exactly know who they are, but whoever they are, they told me I couldn’t hang out with my friends or have people over or go to movies or out to eat.

That’s all stuff we are supposed to get to do when we are kids...right!

Lord, I just wish you would come on down and make this right! Who messed up anyway? I mean, I have heard that this covid thing came from bats. I have heard it came from a factory in China. I have heard that it came from nowhere...that it was

just all made up. I'm just a kid and I have seen some friends get sick. I have seen some parents and grandparents get real sick. It sure seems real to me!

But, I can't help but wonder...is it happening because you are angry with us? Is it happening because you are finally fed up with us not paying attention to you? Is it happening because we have not done the things you are asking us to do? That doesn't sound like You!

Sure, you have been mad at us before, but you have always gotten over it. You have always forgiven us and forgotten all the stuff we did to make you mad! So what is the deal now? Why are you so p...so angry with us now?

Isaiah says you are angry because we sinned and then hid from you. Are you angry because we hid ourselves from you? Are you angry because we haven't turned to you and asked you for healing and for hope? That does kind of sound like you. It seems like I have heard a few times that you really like it when we ask you to help us. Would it help if we asked you now?

I will ask you! I will ask you right now! God! Help us! Help us remember that everything we are going through right now is something we are all going through together. Help us to remember that you are going through it with you! Help us to remember that you are the potter and we are the clay! Help us to remember that you are molding us and that we are not a finished work.

God, I kind of remember Pastor Jack talking about something from Ezra and Nehemiah. He said that a long time ago, the people you chose were coming back to their homes after they had p...well, after they made you mad. When they got back, they found everything was torn down and that their cities had been destroyed.

One of those guys, I don't remember which one, started rebuilding the wall around the town. All the people of the town came out and asked him, "what are you doing? This looks like a big mess." Do you know what the guy answered? He said, "everything looks like a mess when you are in the middle!"

God, help us remember that we are in the middle. You are still forming us and we think we are just a bunch of pieces because right now, that is all we are. But help

us look past that and realize that we are really just stuck in the middle. Pastor Jack wanted me to add, just like the song, “Stuck in the middle with You.” But I don’t know that song. Probably some old song he remembers but I don’t...I think he said something about “Steely Dan?” Anyway, we are in the middle and it looks like a mess! Isaiah tells us it won’t always, that someday you will finish and then we will understand. God, help us remember!

I’m pretty sure God heard me. I know he always hears, but ya know, Mark has a reminder just in case you are wondering. “In those days, the moon will be darkened and the sun will not shine and the stars will be falling and everything will be shaken up.” That sounds a lot like what has been happening lately.” He goes on to say that soon after that, we will see the Lord coming in the clouds and everything will be restored.

We do not know what Christmas will bring this year...maybe more this year than any year any of us has ever known, but we do know that there will be Christmas. We do know that there will be celebration and remembering of that night a long time ago in Bethlehem. We do know that there will be images of shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. We do know there will be images of animals and a manger. We do know that eventually the wise men, who seem so far away now, will eventually arrive and they will fall on their knees and give praise and glory to God!

We do not know how all of this will unfold for us, whether we will be able to gather together or whether we will gather apart, but we know that as it does unfold, it will be something special. Over in 1Corinthians 13, we are reminded that now, we see only in part but then, when Christmas arrives, we will see fully. Now we see through a mirror lit dimly, but then we shall see face to face. Now, we see through a light that is coming into the world, but on Christmas, we will see the light of the world!

Today, there is all this stuff they tell me I can’t do. It is stuff that I want to do, but I know that it is not stuff I should do for just a little while. It is that “middle” kind of stuff where I can’t see what will happen at the end but I know what the end will be. The end will be Jesus, the light of the world and the wait for all God is doing right now will have been worth it.

Matthew tells us he is Emmanuel, “God with us” and that his name is Jesus which means he saves us from our sins. When our stuff, all that stuff that keeps God hidden from us is put away and we can see face to face, then we will know and there will be peace. There will be the kind of peace that passes all understanding. Pastor Jack calls this “Shalom” which means nothing is missing and nothing is broken.

The mountains may quake and the darkness may appear for now, but soon, there will be the “light” which is coming into the world and the darkness cannot overcome it! Peace!

Youth Offering:

(Ask Ushers to come forward)

Prayer before Offering—God, here we are again. We are asking for some help for the work you are calling our youth group to do. These people give so much to help us and still here we are, asking for more. Bless these gifts and let them be used the way you want them to be used. This we ask through the power of Your Holy Spirit and in Jesus’ name. Amen!

Closing song:

Blessing and sending:

God, we came in darkness and now we can see light. Help us to know your light in our lives and send us out into the world to be that light for others. Let us go in peace now, to love and serve you! Our service is now ended. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!