

**Worship Service “Finding Hope”**  
**Advent 1, Year A, 27th November, 2022**  
**Isaiah 2:1-5 NIV / Matthew 24:36-44 NRSV**

**Prelude**

**Opening Video**      [\*\*What is Advent? Gangnam Style!\*\*](#)

Produced and posted to YouTube by Xt3dotcom

**Welcome Guests / Announcements**

**Litany of the Greens**

Each year we decorate our church and often our homes with many symbols that have developed over the centuries to represent the hope and promise we have in the arrival, life, and death of Jesus Christ. This morning we celebrate in the Hanging of the Greens, the inclusion of these symbols in our worship space. Please stand as you are able, in body in spirit, as we recognize the meaning of these symbols among us. In the coming weeks, we will gradually add these symbolic decorations to our worship space. Let's start today

(Responsive)

**One:** How can we prepare this house for the coming of Jesus, the King?

**All:** **With branches of cedar, the tree of royalty.**

**One:** How shall we prepare this house for the coming of Jesus, the eternal Christ?

**All:** **With garlands of wreaths of pine and fir, whose leaves are ever living, ever green.**

**One:** How shall we prepare this house for the coming of Jesus, our savior?

**All:** **With arrangements of holly and ivy, symbolizing His passion, death and resurrection.**

**One:** How shall we prepare this house for the coming of Jesus, the Son of God?

**All:** **By hearing again the words of the prophets who foretold the saving work of God.**

**One:** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

**All:** **All Glory to God in the highest!**

## Pass the Peace/Hanging of the Greens

This morning, after we share the peace of Christ with each other, let us begin the task of the Hanging of the Greens by decorating the windows of our sanctuary with candles and garland. You will find the supplies on the back pew and one of the windows has been set up as an example..

### Opening Music

*Holy, Holy, Holy*

120

### Call to Worship [responsive]

One: Awake, for a new day is dawning;

**All: Hope sparks and catches flame.**

One: Arise, for the time is approaching;

**All: Peace seizes the hearts of the people.**

One: Announce to the world that the Lord is coming;

**One: Joy fills the air, moves us into the dance  
of the Spirit.**

One: The Advent of our God is here!

**All: God's Love is coming into our world and  
lives in a new way.**

### Invocation

Light of the World, shine through the cracks in our brokenness.

Light of the World, shine a way forward when we cannot discern where to go.

Light of the World, guide us with Your wisdom, may Your words be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.

Light of the World, shine in us, so we might become living hope for others who cannot find the light.

Light of the World, burn bright, for much of the universe is in darkness.

Sun of Righteousness, rise with healing in your wings, and bring Your light to the world. Amen.

### Prophetic Reading: **Isaiah 2:1-5 NIV**

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

## **The Advent Candle**

On the first Sunday of Advent, we look for signs of hope in our world. People helping each other. Walls of separation being broken down. Bridges crossing great divides. We find signs of hope in a family, traveling a long way from home, expecting a baby and being surrounded by the compassion of strangers. We light this first candle for the hope we find in the world, as we wait for Christ to come into our world and lives in a new way.

## **Lighting of the First Advent Candle**

This morning, as we sing our advent hymn ushering in our waiting for Immanuel, God with us, we change our paraments to purple, a royal color to remind us of the King of Kings, who came to be the "Light of the World"

**Hymn**     *O Come, O Come Immanuel*                     **172**

**Changing of the Paraments** (During the hymn)

**A Time of Prayer**

**Joys and Concerns**

**Pastoral Prayer**

In the hushed anticipation of your coming, O Lord, kindle in us the desire to remain awake; that we might be ready for your coming, and eager to pray.

O God, in days to come the mountain of your house will be established, and your joy shall reign. We pray for the church (especially...), that you might teach us your ways and that we might walk in your paths.

Out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and you, O God, shall judge between the nations. We pray for our nation, and all nations, that your peace would be manifest in every corner of the earth.

In your Kingdom, O Lord, wolves lie down with lambs and children play with serpents without fear. We pray for the sick, the suffering, and those in distress of any kind

(especially...); that you would heal all injuries, comfort all grief, and settle all wrongs.

In your Kingdom, O Lord, even the wilderness and dry land are glad and rejoice.

We pray for those who rejoice this week as they celebrate their birthday (especially... and anniversaries...); that they might obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing might flee away.

In the fullness of time, O God, you sent your son, to be born of our sister Mary.

And his name was Emmanuel: God With Us. We thank you for your Presence with us, and we pray that you might be always present with those whom we love but see no longer.

Come among us O God, and hear our prayers; so that when your Son Jesus comes among us with great might, and in manger mild, we might recognize his face and his voice, and come to adore him. **Amen.**

### **Gospel Reading: Matthew 24:36-44 NRSV**

"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark,

and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.

Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

### **Message - *Finding Hope***

Hope can be an elusive commodity, can't it? We often seek and place our hope in so many aspects of our lives. We hope that our job will give us security and fulfillment. Our family and friends, particularly our children, can be great sources of hope for us. We have hope that our physical journeys will be healthy and long. We seek hope in the institutions and foundations of the world around us, those tenets of our country and culture that give us security, in human nature itself Yet many events in our lives can cause us to lose our grip on

what gives us hope. I'm sure we can all identify with jobs we've had that have caused us frustration, where it seems like we don't seem to be making an impact or getting very far ahead. Sometimes our hope can be shaken in our connections to family and friends. We want the best for those we care about yet often they make choices and take actions that we see as not living up to the potential that we expected them to achieve in life. Our own life journeys can leave us in the lurch as well. Have any of us really ended up where we thought we would be at this stage in our lives? Some may have not even thought they'd reach the stage they're at now. It's not just our own personal spheres that can shake our hold on hope. Events in the larger world can shatter the hope that we placed in those institutions we counted on. Governments can go astray and erode those protections that we never thought we'd have to worry about; our leaders can let us down and not show the compassion and caring we expect.

When faced with hopelessness, we often look to other times to find hope. We look to the past, to what we remember as better times, when the world made more sense, when there seemed to be promise in the future. We wish for a return of the "good ole days." Some, however, set their sights on the future, putting their hopes on the promise of better days to come. Regardless of where we seek hope, we tend to focus on keeping ourselves busy in the here and now. We stay involved in the present day to day activities of life, going about our days with our attention on the very human tasks of a human life: we go to work, we socialize with family and friends, many marry and have families, and so on. These become the things that give us joy and we carry on through carrying on. Our scripture lessons this morning are full of these themes.

In Isaiah, we have the hope for the future, written down in a time when its readers were under the control of a conquering enemy, living in exile in a foreign land. They had lost everything, and had to rebuild their lives and culture from scratch. The prophet offered them hope in a future redemption under a leader who would usher in a golden era of peace and tranquility.

Likewise in Matthew, we have people who had lived for centuries under brutal oppression and foreign domination in their own land. By the time Matthew was written down, most of them were again exiled, this time throughout the known world, scattered to the wind. As followers of Christ, they desperately clung to the hope of his return, and many eagerly looked for signs that promised redemption was soon at hand. Yet a generation then two had come and gone, and there still was no redemption, no relief from the struggles they faced.

In Isaiah, they likewise found themselves quickly under the control and domination of a foreign conqueror, longing again for the hope of promised redemption. So in a very human way, they began to find ways to fit into the normalcy they could create for themselves. They married and had careers and families, and focused on the here and now, sometimes at the expense of the gospel they were called to spread. Jesus addresses this very human condition in comparing the current generation to that of Noah.

In Noah's day life carried on as if all was well, people married and had children, confident in the hope of a future for the next generation. Yet they were still living in the time of God's choosing, and were caught up in the course of events like everyone else and were likewise caught unawares when the flood waters came.

In the early Christian community you also had the opposite, those who thought the signs were clear of Christ's imminent return, and no longer saw the point in living a productive, evangelical life, Instead they were content to look to the skies for that cataclysmic sign of Christ descending from the clouds.

That is the struggle of living in the "between time." There is the hope of a future redemption yet the uncertainty of when that time will come. It is a liminal space frustrating in its lack of clarity and definition. The end could be tomorrow or the end could be a millenia down the road. Jesus reinforces this uncertainty in stating that not even the angels nor he knows God's timeline for the end of things. So the only reasonable course is to be ready, to be prepared; to live your daily life as if it were the last day. That doesn't mean you abandon the routines of life in the world in which you live, but you live out that life with the hope of a promising future. You live into the kin-dom of God that draws nearer.

How do you live your life? Where do you find hope in the "in between" time in which we live? Jesus is the hope promised in Isaiah and offers the hope of a future through him. But it isn't just about having hope. It's also about giving hope. In the rest of this chapter and the next, Jesus tells three parables all with messages defining our role in staying prepared and being ready. None of these focus on sitting quietly in contemplation. None of these stresses only making sure you yourself get your ticket to heaven. They all stress working to bring hope to others.

The last of these parables ends with the line, "whatever you did not do for the least of these, you did not do for me." Those that did not offer hope to the hopeless, in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats did not have a good time when called to account before their Creator.

French poet and novelist Victor Hugo wrote, "Hope is the word God has written on the brow of every man." How do people see hope through you? Is it clearly evident when they look at you as if it were written on your brow? How do you offer hope to those in need of hope, and how do we as a community of faith be the beacon of hope we are called to be?

This morning those are not simply rhetorical questions. As we listen to our musical interlude shortly, you have two assignments. The first is to think of one thing you can do to offer hope to another person this week. The second task is to think of one way we as a community of faith can offer hope to the community around us. Let us take time, not just in a few minutes this morning, but everyday, to reflect on how we can be God's people of hope in a world that finds itself more and more lacking in hope of any kind. Amen.

## **A Call to Serve**

As recipients of the generosity of God, let us share our generosity with each other and the community through our time and the gifts we've been given.

## **A Time for Reflection - *Musical Interlude***

### **The Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Generous God,

For the wondrous ways this offering will bless this community, we dedicate these gifts.

For the ways it'll help us live out God's mission, we dedicate these gifts.

Let these gifts strengthen our call to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly. **Amen.**

**Hymn**                      *How Firm a Foundation*                      **567**

### **Benediction**

As we journey forth this morning into a world filled with the ever busier bustling of the holiday season, let's take intentional time each day, quiet time, unplugged time, to reflect on how we were a light to others that day and how we can be a light in the darkness everyday, in all that we say and do. Amen.