



Church of the Epiphany

FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Advent 4 • Cloudcroft, New Mexico • December 22, 2024



Advent 4

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and as we are sorely hindered by our sins from running the race that is set before us, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

Readings for Advent 4

The Holy Gospel

Luke 1:39-4

Lessons for Lessons and Carols

Good morning! We praise God and thank Him on this final Sunday of Advent. In years past, I believe I have shared with you about being a last-minute Christmas shopper, and asked you whether you too will be waiting until the last minute to find that perfect gift? I mention this as a way of reminding us once again that Advent is about God **not** waiting until the last minute to find the perfect gift for us all, the perfect Savior. Lord knows, there is still plenty of hate in the world. So COME, LORD JESUS! COME!

Before we dive into today's Gospel reading, let us re-visit last week's Gospel for a moment. Both are from Luke, chapter 3, and last week we read part of the story of John the Baptist. John was baptizing, and people were coming to him in droves. Remember he called them, "You brood of vipers!" You can almost picture that in your mind as a newspaper headline with a dramatic photo of John the Baptist right below it. He sternly charged them all, soldiers, tax collectors, everyone, to repent, for he was pointing to the One who was to come, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. At the same time, I hope you also remember how Luke set the *timing* of the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist. That was actually in the Gospel reading from the week before. This Advent stuff all fits together. This Bible stuff all fits together, for that matter. Luke described a specific event in the reign of a specific Roman ruler during which certain other specifically named public officials were in office and the priesthood was held by two specifically named persons. Without calendars like we have, that was the customary

way in which important events were recorded back then. Luke intended to make it absolutely clear that he was referring to an important event that actually happened at a particular time and in a particular place! So there is no question that there really was, historically, a John the Baptist. We know from chapter one of Luke's Gospel that his mother was Elizabeth, who appears in the Gospel for today, and his father was Zechariah. The story of Zechariah is in the lectionary for a different year of the three-year cycle, but you can read it this week if you like. In fact, that will be the homework assignment for Christmas week, to read the entire birth narrative in the first three chapters of the Gospel of Luke. Better yet, read it out loud to your children and grandchildren, and even your great-grandchildren. Just don't start out with "Once upon a time," because Luke wasn't spinning fairy tales, he was telling the world about actual, historical events.

But we also know that John the Baptist came only to prepare the way for the coming Savior, for Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus' earthly father was Joseph, of the house and lineage of David, and his mother was Mary, who is a central figure in today's Gospel. Mary and Elizabeth were related to one another. The genealogy is all there, and it is clear, establishing the historical truth of the existence of these people.

From what we read in today's Gospel, it is clear that Mary didn't have any question about Who the child she was carrying really was. Nor did her cousin Elizabeth or the child she was carrying,

who was - who? John the Baptist! The extent of Mary's understanding of what this meant is clear in the words of her song, part of which we read today. It echoes the Song of Hannah from 1 Samuel, chapter 2, which Hannah sang when she was blessed with the child Samuel in her old age. Like I said, this Bible stuff all fits together. Mary understands that the Savior will "have mercy on those who fear Him from generation to generation." But she also knows that He will bring "down the powerful from their thrones" and that they won't go easily. Lifting up the lowly will cause revolutionary changes in the way the culture works. The pecking order will be abolished, and love and peace will come to fill the vacuum left behind.

What we must decide, finally decide for sure and forever, is who these people really were, specifically whether John the Baptist was **the** prophet, and whether Jesus of Nazareth **is** God come to earth in the flesh. That amounts to our acceptance of God's gift to us, our acceptance of the gift of life itself, life eternal in Christ Jesus. Once **we** decide Who He **is** - not who He **was**, but Who He **is**, the co-eternal Son of God who came to take away the sin of the world - once we come to that realization and accept God's gift, a lot of things start to fall into place. We realize that we are heirs of the promises of God in Holy Scripture. The promise to which we look forward today, the promise that Mary was seeing fulfilled, is that Jesus will reign

over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. That's an unconditional promise of God Almighty. We know from the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles that we are adopted into the household and family of Jacob, and so that promise runs to us. The birth of Jesus, as promised to Mary, was the beginning of a new era. The birth of Jesus in our hearts starts a new era for each of us - that's what being born again is about. My prayer for this last Sunday of Advent is that Jesus might be born in our hearts anew or born in our hearts again, that we might see and receive the fullness of His revelation of Himself in Holy Scripture, and that we might see and receive what we can be to and for one another in His name. For we know (we had better know by the fourth Sunday of Advent) that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He is coming. He is coming again, and there isn't much time left, especially for those who are waiting until the last minute. It will be a time of joy for us, but a time of sorrow for those who wait until it is too late. So let us share the good news, for to do so will add to our joy, to their joy, and even to God's joy! AMEN



Prayer List - 12/22/24

St. Stephen's Anglican Church, Roswell, NM
Rev. Bob Tally

Bishop Steven and. Tricia

Those who need your healing care and strength:

Frank & Carolyn Wilson
Ellie
Darcy Ellis
Donya Conine; Wayne Conine Jr.
Hannah & Evelyn Conine
Sean Lofland
Mary Espinosa
Chip & Alyssa Taylor and baby
Julius
Rev. Elias Rosales Mendez
Baby, Naomi Jade Dircherl and her
family
Paisley Ryan Creed

Those in the Armed Forces:

Dominick Rankin, US Army, Ft. Bliss, TX
Gabriella Murley, Ft. Bliss, TX
Mason Gregg, Camp Courtney, Okinawa
Creed Napier, US Air Force,
J.W. Grove, US Navy
Nicholas Tran, Joint Base Lewis- McChord,
Shawn Zima, Hong Kong
Wyatt Green, US Navy

We pray for our Epiphany family:

J.R. Hester
Machele Lackey
Susie Sims
Bert and Judy Hungerford
Raul, Sarah, Evelyn Issa
Al and Kathy Osborn

Lessons for Advent 4
December 22, 2024
Anglican Lectionary
year C

Lessons and Carols with Holy Gospel

First Lesson Genesis 3:8-19

God tells sinful Adam that he has lost the life of Paradise

#154 vs. 1-3 "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

Second Lesson Isaiah 9:1-3, 6-7

The Prophet foretells the coming of the Savior

#189 vs. 1-3 "Angels From the Realms of Glory"

Third Lesson Isaiah 11:1-9

The peace that Christ will bring is foreshown

#190 "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"

Fourth Lesson Luke 1:26-38

The Angel Gabriel salutes the Virgin Mary

#169 vs 1-3 "The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came"

Fifth Lesson. Luke 2:1-7

The birth of Jesus

#221 "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly"

Sixth Lesson. Luke 2:8-16

The Shepherd go to the Manger

#228 vs. 1-3 "While Shepherd watched Their Flocks by Night"

Seventh Lesson. Matthew 2:1-12

The Wisemen are led by the star to Jesus

#236 Vs, 1-3 "As With Gladness, Men of Old"



The Holy Gospel

Luke 1:39-56

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, **40** and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. **41** And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, **42** and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! **43** And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? **44** For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. **45** And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones

and exalted those of humble estate;

53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

56 And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.