**Solidarity with Sisters’ Communal Prayer for**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent, Dec. 19, 2021**

*“Blessed are you among women,   
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”*

**THANKS…**

* For all of us joined in faith, hope, love, and work for justice and peace.
* To **Gail DeGeorge** and **Alicia Urban** for preparing this communal prayer.
* To **Deb Ballard** for lighting her Advent wreath with us this week, and **Rose Marie Smith** for sharing her Advent tradition.
* To **Stu Sklamm,**  **Linda Donaldson**, and **Reggie** **Ott** for leading our music.
* To the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer: **Deb Ballard,** **Peg** **Duchesne, Carolyn Henrich, Kathleen Cross; Pat Gabig, George Urban, Greg Campbell, and Arlene McGarrity**
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please get in touch.
* Christmas Eve reminder

**SETTLING IN   (Alicia Urban)**

As we begin our liturgy, let the love of Jesus and the anticipation we feel during Advent flood into your being slowly with each inward breath pray Come and Exhale pray Jesus: “Come, ….Jesus, ….come, ….Jesus, ….come, ….Jesus” and feel being filled with His Love! (pause)

Now let’s all take three deep breaths: one to be here in prayer, one to be with one another, and one for the struggles for justice and adequate food and shelter for people in our country and the rest of the world.

om, Jesus, come, Jesus, come, Jesus." and be filled with his love

PAUSE

Now let us welcome the light as we listen to the Antiphon, and **Deb Ballard** will light the 4 candles

**OPENING AND LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH (Stu Sklamm, Linda Donaldson,**

**Deb Ballard)**

Stu:                 O Beloved, Word made flesh, we cry!

Linda:                   Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Stu:                 O Beloved, dwell with us, we cry!

Linda:                    Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Stu:                 O Beloved, full of grace, we cry!

Linda:                    Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Stu:                 O Beloved, grace on grace we cry!

Linda:                    Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

**Deb:** Please join us in lighting your four Advent candles.   (Deb and all light candles.)

**Deb:** We pray –

God of light, open us to see you in the unlikely places.  Give us light for our next step

**Linda (and all, muted):**  Rejoice! Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

**GATHERING PRAYER  (Peg** **Duchesne)**

God of hope, who brought love into this world,  
be the love that dwells between us.  
God of hope, who brought peace into this world,  
be the peace that dwells between us.  
God of hope, who brought joy into this world,  
be the joy that dwells between us.  
God of hope, the rock we stand upon,  
be the center, the focus of our lives  
always, and particularly this Advent time.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME OF WORSHIP            (Gail)**

This last week of Advent we are inviting you to take a fresh look at the familiar stories that lead us toward Bethlehem. Week by week the readings have asked us to live with great joy as we work toward God’s just and merciful reign.  What are we called to celebrate with joy despite so much violence and suffering in our world?

**INTRODUCTION TO THE READING FROM MICAH (Gail)**

 Our reading from the prophet Micah points toward the significance of small places and beginnings or renewal. The town, Ephrathah, shows that the smallest of places can bring new birth.  This town was near Bethlehem.  Similar to Isaiah, Micah highlights the future mother of the future Davidic ruler.  The silence about the father in this verse was interpreted by early Christian writers as an indication of the virginal conception of the promised messiah. The 3rd verse reflects the aura of mystery and the promises surrounding the Davidic dynasty. Let it sink in that the Messiah will not only bring peace but BE peace itself. What hope this brings to our current waiting, hoping, and praying for peace and for the coming of the babe in the manger.

Now **Pat Gabig** will read from the book of Micah.  Then **Carolyn Henrich** will offer questions for our reflection.  You can stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 1 (Pat Gabig)**

    Thus says the Yahweh:  
    You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah  
        too small to be among the clans of Judah,  
    from you shall come forth for me  
        one who is to be ruler in Israel;  
    whose origin is from of old,  
        from ancient times.

But God will give them over to their enemies, until the time  
        when she who is in labor has given birth  
    Then the remnant of the ruler’s kin shall return  
        to the children of Israel.  
    He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock  
        by the strength of God  
        in the majestic name of Yahweh their God  
    They shall live in security, for now

their leader’s greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth.               He shall be peace.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS** *[Pause between questions.]* (**Carolyn Henrich)**

Imagine yourself as one who is standing firm and being a shepherd to God’s people.  How would you ask for strength?

What happens within your heart when you hear that the greatness of God “shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall **be peace**”?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  **(Betty:**Share slide 1, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.**)**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL (Alicia)**

Our Gospel begins soon after the Annunciation, as Mary goes “in haste” to visit her cousin. Mary arrives and Elizabeth’s baby leaps within her.  First century Jews would have remembered the story of David dancing before the ark of the covenant as it arrives in Jerusalem – another time when the presence of God quickens joy and fulfillment.

Luke has composed his infancy narratives to link previous scriptural moments with the birth of Jesus.  Elizabeth is one of a series of women unable to conceive, going back to Sara, mother of Isaac, and Hannah, mother of Samuel. Luke’s story of Mary, a virgin, full of grace, surpasses all other miraculous pregnancies.  A new era begins and Elizabeth’s proclaims that God’s promise of salvation is being fulfilled by the child Mary is carrying.

Rich in theological connections, this beautiful story affirms the central role of faithful women who proclaim the Gospel. We see them and hear their voices throughout the narratives of the life of Jesus.  And they are the first witnesses to the resurrection, the birth of new life over death and sin.

Just after today’s reading, Luke shares Mary’s canticle.  The power of God’s action in her will be magnified to encompass the whole world.  In Mary’s fierce song we find the connection of the birth of Jesus to God’s promise to bring justice to the earth.  God will vindicate the women and children who have always been the first victims of abusive power. They are now the first ones to receive news of the entry of God into human history on behalf of the poor.

Our advent pilgrimage continues during the current “best of times, worst of times.”  Now, as in the scriptures, self-sacrificing love stands firm in the face of chaos and suffering.  Crisis offers us the opportunity to find our own grace and the courage to ask what lessons need to be learned.   How will the next generation look back on us in the Advent and Christmas of 2021?   Are we continuing the story that Mary and Elizabeth began?  Are we heralds who proclaim and welcome the Good News as they did?

Now Kathleen Cross will read from the Gospel of Luke.

**GOSPEL READING** [**Lk 1:39-45**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/luke/1?39)    **(Kathleen Cross)**

Mary set out  
and traveled to the hill country in haste  
to a town of Judah,   
where she entered the house of Zechariah  
and greeted Elizabeth.  
When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting,  
the infant leaped in her womb,   
and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit,   
cried out in a loud voice and said,   
“Blessed are you among women,   
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.  
And how does this happen to me,   
that the mother of the Messiah should come to me?  
For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears,   
the infant in my womb leaped for joy.  
Blessed are you who believed  
that what was spoken to you by our God

would be fulfilled.”

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS 2** *(Pause after each question.)***(Carolyn Henrich)**

Imagine yourself there when the two close cousins meet. Let your feelings speak to you. When have you felt a connection—to Mary, or Elizabeth or to another person -- that strong? How do you keep your close connection?

How do you feel about being able to turn to someone else when you feel isolated and overwhelmed? To whom might you turn?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  **(Betty:**Share slide 1, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.**)**

**CONTEMPLATIVE REFLECTION   (Carolyn Henrich)**

As we listen to “Come Lord Maranatha” let’s reflect on this question:

When have you had a period of waiting for an important life event to unfold? How did God accompany you?

Then after the song, we will have a short period for meditative silence.

**Betty:** **Start slide 4** - Play Ricky Manolo, CSP’s “Come Lord, Marantha” from start. Fade starting 2:40, stop immediately at 2:47. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOGE1Z15tP8>

**Then move to slide 5.**

**Time 2 minutes and chime.**

**Betty:**  Now George Urban will lead our sharing.

**SHARING (George Urban)**

We invite you to **briefly** share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you listened and as you reflected on these readings.  That helps us to glimpse the many ways God is among us.  We welcome new voices, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening.  And let’s leave a bridge of silence between speakers.

We begin in silence as we gather our reflections.  *[Long pause.]*

Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute again afterwards.

Who would like to begin?

(Sharing)

(Let sharing continue for about 20 minutes.)

Thank you for your insights and thoughts.  We have to stop now, and we can continue after the final song, as we often do.  Now let us pray together.

Peg Duchesne will facilitate our intentions**.**

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY (Peg Duchesne)**

Let us pause and gather the prayers that are rising in us.  *[Pause.]*

Our response will be:  \_Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

Emmanuel, God with us, keep us alert to how your reign is emerging in unlikely places and people.  Help us to magnify your presence there.

For this we pray:  Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

Emmanuel, God with us, be with the leadership of Catholic Sisters and all religious sisters, as they strive to bring faith, hope, and love to our world.

For this we pray:  Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

Emmanuel, God with us, pray with us for so many, many people who suffer from violent loss of a loved one, from natural disasters, discrimination, loss of home and crops, hunger and malnutrition, and all other  tragedies.

For this we pray:  Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

Emmanuel, God with us, pray for healing of all the divisions of our people as well as the violence against people of color or differences and political opponents.

For this we pray:  Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

For what else shall we pray?  Please remember to unmute and mute yourself afterwards.

(People speak.) Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

Thank you.

O God, we give you all our prayers, spoken and unspoken.  We will do all that we can to put our prayers into action – wh~~i~~le entrusting the outcome to you.  Amen.

**OFFERTORY Sharing Advent Tradition                 (Gail** and **Rose Marie Smith)**

**Gail:**  Each of us has traditional ways of Advent preparation.  Today **Rose Marie Smith** will share her family’s preparation for celebrating the birth of Jesus.

**Rose Marie:** (1-2 minutes – the tradition and its value as I prepare for Christmas)

**Betty:** Start slide 5 when Rose Marie begins. Move to Slide 6 as Rose Marie says, “Then the oldest grandchild present reads the first passage. The question following the reading centers on the importance of the light in our lives today.”

**Gail:**  Knowing all that we have received from God, let us now take time to name within ourselves something we will do this week to let God sing in us.  [Pause.]

Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Deb Ballard)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in and among us.  *[Pause.]*

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet

and said, “… as I have done for you, you should also do.”

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the cup,

gifts of the earth and work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it. *[Pause.]*

Holy One, make us your bread of abundance.  Make us your wine of joy.

Let even our fragments be plenty to share.

Amen.

**OUR FATHER, OUR MOTHER      (Greg Campbell)**

**ALL MUTED**

Now let us join our hearts with all who seek the coming of God, using the words that Jesus gave us written by the Polynesian and Māori people and the New Zealand Anglican community:

Eternal Spirit,  
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe;  
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world;  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings;  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trial too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and forever. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING         (Arlene McGarrity)**

Advent God,  
we journey with you,  
to Bethlehem’s stable  
and a new-born King,  
ears attuned  
to the song of angels,  
eyes alert  
for Bethlehem’s star.  
Forgive us  
if on our journey  
if we are distracted  
by the tempting offers   
of this world.  
Keep our hearts aflame  
with the hope  
of Christmas,  
and the promise  
of a Saviour.  Amen.

**CLOSING SONG                         (Linda)**

**“Soon and Very Soon” Composer: Andrae Edward Crouch**

Soon and very soon,

We are going to see the King,

Soon and very soon,

We are going to see the King.

Soon and very soon,

We are going to see the King,

Hallelujah, hallelujah,

We are going to see the King.

No more crying there,

We are going to see the King,

No more crying there,

We are going to see the King.

No more crying there,

We are going to see the King,

Hallelujah, Hallelujah,

We are going to see the King.

No more dying there,

We are going to see the King,

No more dying there,

We are going to see the King.

No more dying there,

We are going to see the King,

Hallelujah, Hallelujah,

We are going to see the King.

Hallelujah, ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-jah,

Hallelujah, ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-jah,

Hallelujah, ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-jah,

Hallelujah, ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-jah!

**RESOURCES:**

USCCB: Fourth Sunday of Advent, 2021

Collegeville Biblical Commentary, “Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk” by Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P.

Pastoral scene with shepherd and sheep. https://lovingmylord.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/shepherd2.jpg

Image of Mary & Elizabeth https://i.pinimg.com/originals/52/86/4b/52864b094fb574c7b0e24f0d2ffb9dc9.jpg

“Ricky Manolo, CSP’s ‘Come Lord, Maranatha’ – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOGE1Z15tP8

The Visitation, Fourth Sunday of Advent, 2020, by Pat Marrin