**December 24, 2023 Fourth Sunday of Advent – Email/At Home Missal**

**The ZOOM link for today’s service, which opens at 9.30 am on December 24, 2023, can be found here:**

**Sunday Worship December 24, 2023 09:30 am ZOOM room opens; service begins at 10:00 am.**

**Join Zoom Meeting click here:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83858523329?pwd=UUpVdCtkTDB0MWhTVkhjSmxvWjFnUT09>**

**Meeting ID: 838 5852 3329 Passcode: 629887**

**You don’t have to have a computer or internet to connect to any of our church Zoom services; you can also just call in on one of these numbers (long distance charges may apply): (All Canadian numbers). You can also access the ZOOM from your telephone by using the “One tap mobile” option:**

**+12042727920,,83858523329#,,,,\*629887# Canada**

**+14388097799,,83858523329#,,,,\*629887# Canada**

**Dial by your location:**

**+1 778 907 2071 Canada**

**+1 780 666 0144 Canada**

**+1 204 272 7920 Canada  
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**+1 647 374 4685 Canada  
+1 647 558 0588 Canada**

**Meeting ID: 838 5852 3329 Passcode: 629887**

**Find your local number:** [**https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kz0pHIt5i**](https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kz0pHIt5i)

**……………………………………….**

**IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR THE WEEK OF DECEMBER 24TH –DECEMBER 31ST, 2023:**

**Here is the YouTube link for the service from last Sunday, December 17th, 2023:** <https://youtu.be/FNpnuWb6PpE>

**……………………………………….**

**Coming Events** (save these dates) **bold print - events being held here at St. Peter’s**

**Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 7:00 pm**

**Dec. 25 Christmas Day Service 10:00 am**

**Feb. 14 Ash Wednesday Service 7:00 pm**

Apr. 5-7 Bishop’s spiritual Retreat for Lay Persons (Mount Carmel, Niagara Falls)

**The Life of St. Peter’s for the week of December 24 – December. 31, 2023**

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

**Sunday 10:00 am Worship Service**

**……………………………………….**

1. **Pastoral Visit:** Pastor Laura is available for visits by appointment by calling the church office, 519-653-4721. Whether you have a particular pastoral concern or would just like some one-to-one time to get to know Pastor Laura, she would love to meet with you.
2. **……………………………………….**
3. **Prayer List:**  Bill, Don, Tammy, Alice, Don, Lynn, Helen, Sharon, Donald, Shirley, Clara, Carol, Jeff, Aaron, MacKenzie, Rhett, Linda, Jan Ken, Lee, Maria, Deborah, Fred, Anne, Sherri, Panagiota.
4. **……………………………………….**

## We need you to help feed our neighbourhood! The freedom Centre has joined with Cambridge Community Table to offer a meal to our community twice a month on Tuesday night. We need volunteers: Food Preparation, set up, take down, meet and Greet. Every hour you can give once or twice a month. Call for information 519-591-6518 or email [rosemary@freedomcentre.ca](mailto:rosemary@freedomcentre.ca).

1. **……………………………………….**
2. **Weekly Bible Study**: Resumes again on Wednesday January 17th, 2023 at 10:30 am in the Art Room. Everyone is welcome!
3. **……………………………………….**
4. To our members and friends who supported **St. Peter's "Wrap up your shopping" Christmas Fundraiser**.
5. I am confident you will enjoy the Atwood Heritage Summer Sausage, Esta Chocolates, and Snyder's Organic Maple Syrup. Merry Christmas! Alex Black
6. **……………………………………….**
7. The red poinsettia in the chancel has been placed by Bill and Patricia Hewitt. The white poinsettia has been placed by Barbara Berg. Our sincere thanks for their thoughtfulness and generosity - they will be enjoyed by all!
8. **……………………………………….**

**Presiding Pastor: Rev. Laura Sauder**

**Organist & Director of Music: Bradley Moggach**

**Assisting Minister: Kim Strassburger**

**Reader: John Leonard**

**Land Acknowledgement:**

A: With good and grateful hearts we acknowledge that the land upon which we live, work, play, and worship, is the same land upon which the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and the Attawandaron (or Neutral) peoples first lived, worked, played, and prayed to Creator. Calling the earth upon which they stood, Mother Earth, they cared for the earth as they would care for their mother. Let us take an example from our Indigenous forbears and neighbours, and show gratitude to our Mother Earth. May we be ever mindful of what she has provided for us, even to the next seven generations.

**Welcome remarks**

**Gathering Rite for Advent:**

P: Each week as we approach the Advent

of our Saviour Jesus Christ,

we acknowledge what God’s people

have always known:

***C: Even when God is active in this world,***

***hope is a work in progress.***

P: There are so many people and places and times

still awaiting God’s goodness.

And yet we trust, O God, that through your love,

***C: a familiar light can banish the fear of the other;***

P: Through your love,

***C: the warmth of good cheer***

***can extinguish cold-hearted injustice.***

P: Through your love,

***C: the song of faith***

***can rekindle hope for the hopeless.***

***Candle is lit***

**ELW # 723 ‘Canticle of the Turning’ (Chorus)**

**Chorus**

**My heart shall sing of the day you bring.**

**Let the fires of your justice burn.**

**Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,**

**and the world is about to turn.**

*(Title: Canticle of the Turning; Text: Rory Cooney, b. 1952, based on the Magnificat; Text © 1990 GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638. www.giamusic.com. 800.442.3358. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Music: Irish Traditional; arr. © 1990 GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638. www.giamusic.com. 800.442.3358. All rights reserved. Used by permission.*

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P: May these flames be a sign

that God’s goodness still burns brightly

even when it seems fragile, temporary,

easily extinguished.

When we yet wonder:

How long must this world wait

to see God’s glory?

Know this truth:

You are God’s people,

Called to serve this world

and to let your light shine.

Let the fire of justice burn in your heart,

for the dead still cry

for the flicker of new life we carry.

*(Source: Adapted from “My Heart Shall Sing” Advent Candle-lighting by Barn Geese Worship, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. )*

**Gathering Hymn: ELW # 552 ‘Blessed Be the God of Israel’**

1. Blessed be the God of Israel,

who comes to set us free,

who visits and redeems us,

and grants us liberty.

The prophets spoke of mercy,

of freedom and release;

God shall fulfill the promise

to bring our people peace.

1. Now from the house of David

a child of grace has come,

a Savior who will lead us

to our eternal home.

Before him goes the herald,

forerunner in the way,

the prophet of salvation,

the harbinger of day.

1. On all by death imprisoned

the sun begins to rise,

the dawning of forgiveness

upon the sinner’s eyes,

to guide the feet of pilgrims

along the paths of peace;

oh, bless our God and Savior

with songs that never cease!

*(Title: Blessed Be the God of Israel; Text:* *Michael Perry, 1942-1996, based on Luke 1:68-79; Text © 1973 Jubilate Hymns, admin. Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission. # 48427; Music: Hal H. Hopson, b. 1933; Music © 1983 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission. #122851; Reprinted and Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-727610. All rights reserved.)*

**Greeting**:

P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you always.

***C: And also with you.***

**Theme Time**

**Prayer of the Day**:

God of the prophets, you sent John into the world to proclaim the coming of your son. Give us ears to hear the proclamations of your promises and eyes to see your presence in this world. Amen.

**Gospel Acclamation: ACS Setting 12: *(page 33) (sung)***

**Alleluia *(repeat)***

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**Reader**:

A passage from **Luke 1: 57-80.** May we be equipped by these words to walk in love for God, ourselves, our neighbours, all people, and all God’s creation. **(Brief pause)**

When the time came for Elizabeth to have her child, she gave birth to a boy. Her neighbors and relatives celebrated with her because they had heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy. On the eighth day, it came time to circumcise the child. They wanted to name him Zechariah because that was his father’s name. But his mother replied, “No, his name will be John.”

They said to her, “None of your relatives have that name.” Then they began gesturing to his father to see what he wanted to call him.

After asking for a tablet, he surprised everyone by writing, “His name is John.” At that moment, Zechariah was able to speak again, and he began praising God.

All their neighbors were filled with awe, and everyone throughout the Judean highlands talked about what had happened. All who heard about this considered it carefully. They said, “What then will this child be?” Indeed, the Lord’s power was with him.

John’s father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied,

“Bless the Lord God of Israel  
    because he has come to help and has delivered his people.

He has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David’s house,  
    just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago.

He has brought salvation from our enemies  
    and from the power of all those who hate us.

He has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
    and remembered his holy covenant,  
        the solemn pledge he made to our ancestor Abraham.

He has granted that we would be rescued  
        from the power of our enemies  
    so that we could serve him without fear,  
        in holiness and righteousness in God’s eyes,  
            for as long as we live.

You, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High,  
    for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way.

You will tell his people how to be saved  
    through the forgiveness of their sins.

Because of our God’s deep compassion,  
    the dawn from heaven will break upon us,  
    to give light to those who are sitting in darkness  
    and in the shadow of death,  
        to guide us on the path of peace.”

The child grew up, becoming strong in character. He was in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel. (CEB)

The Living God is with us. **C: And with all creation! Thanks be to God.**

**Engaging with the Story**

**Luke 1:57-80 - Zechariah’s Song**

Some 500 years have passed since the Israelite exiles were first permitted to return to their homeland by the Persian king Cyrus. Some 500 years since the temple was rebuilt. In this time, nations have continued to rise and fall. As we arrive in Zechariah’s time, the kingdom of Judah is now known as Judea. No longer under the rule of Persia, it is now part of the expansive and powerful Roman Empire.

In terms of world history, this is considered a time of stability and peace, but that experience wasn’t spread equally among the people. The Roman Empire was created by acquiring vast territories through deadly violence and the self-serving cooperation of local leaders. Formerly independent peoples – like the Judeans – became clients or servants to the Emperor’s larger imperial schemes. And violence, poverty, and precarity were a daily reality for many in the Roman Empire.1

This is the world in which Zechariah and Elizabeth lived. A world where the Jewish people held the memory of an independent past but the hope of future independence from the Romans was a dangerous and impossible longing.

At the beginning of our story this morning, Zechariah is unable to speak, but it hadn’t always been that way. He’d lost his voice some nine months earlier during his time of service at the temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah was a priest, and part of his priestly duty was taking a turn to offer incense to the Lord in the sanctuary – the holiest and most sacred part of the temple. A task that a single priest would do while the others waited outside. There were many priests and they would cast lots each time to see whose turn it would be do take on this special task. It’s very likely that this was Zechariah’s first time offering the incense, and wouldn’t you know it, an angel appears to him with a message.

The angel tells Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son, and that they are to name the baby John, which means God is gracious. Zechariah can’t believe his ears. He and Elizabeth have been unable to have children, and they’re now well beyond that stage in life. But when Zechariah expresses this doubt to the angel, he loses his voice.

For 9 long months, during the entire pregnancy, Zechariah is unable to speak a word. But as Elizabeth’s belly grows, Zechariah’s hope deepens. When the baby is finally born and Zechariah regains the ability to speak, he praises God with this beautiful song. Zechariah sings of God’s promise of salvation and rescue. Something that I’m sure he’s come to know deep in his heart during his time of imposed contemplation. Zechariah, and later his son, John the Baptist, announce to their community (and to us), the promise that freedom is coming.

“Because of our God’s deep compassion,

the dawn from heaven will break upon us,

to give light to those who are sitting in darkness

and in the shadow of death,

to guide us on the path of peace.”

As nations rise and fall, this promise of freedom and prayer for peace speaks to longings in our time as well. To the longing in our own hearts.

It’s hard to believe that the war in the Holy Land has now been going on for more than two and a half months. The atrocities committed by Hamas, and the disproportionate and unconscionable assault on Gaza; unspeakable horrors and a humanitarian crisis.

And the polarization of this conflict is being felt here in Canada too. Since October 7th, there’s been a rise in both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia – which were already increasing in recent years. Our Jewish and Muslim neighbours are afraid. No matter where you stand on the matter, we cannot hold all Jews accountable for the actions of the state of Israel, and we cannot hold all Muslims (or even all Palestinians) accountable for the actions of Hamas. Violence is wrong no matter who commits it. And everyone deserves to live in safety and peace.

Sadly, if human history has anything to teach us, on our own we struggle to live in peace. We need a saviour for clearly, we cannot save ourselves. We need someone like Jesus to lead us in the path of peace.

This morning the season of Advent draws to a close for another year. And as it does, I want to draw our attention again to the Advent promise that Christ’s reign is already here, even though it’s not yet fully established.

Tonight we will celebrate the birth of Jesus – the one whom we know as the Christ and Saviour of the world. Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught that God’s reign was already among us. And that because of this, we are called to live by a different set of values – values that challenge the selfishness and greed and competition and violence of this world. Values that seek freedom and peace for all people and every community. To live with humility, compassion, respect, and mutual care for one another, even those we call enemies. In spite of past and current failures – we are called to build peace and seek freedom for everyone.

As we seek to prepare the way of the Lord and to celebrate his birth, we join our song with Zechariah’s song for freedom and for peace. With Zechariah, we find our hope not in our feeble attempts, but in God’s action and promise to establish peace in this warring world. For we know this truth: the birth of the Saviour is the beginning of freedom for all. AMEN

1 Richard A. Horsley and Neil Asher Silberman. The Message and the Kingdom. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 11.

**Hymn of the Day: ACS # 903 ‘Freedom Is Coming’**

***[A leader may sing the words in parentheses]***

1 (Oh, freedom,) Freedom is coming.

(oh, freedom,) Freedom is coming.

(oh, freedom.) Freedom is coming. Oh, yes, I know.

(Oh, freedom,) Freedom is coming.

(oh, freedom,) Freedom is coming.

(oh, freedom.) Freedom is coming. Oh, yes, I know.

(Oh, yes, I know.) Oh, oh, yes, I know.

(Oh, yes, I know.) Oh, oh, yes, I know.

(Oh, yes, I know.) Oh, oh, yes, I know. Oh, yes, I know.

(Oh, yes, I know.) Oh, oh, yes, I know.

(Oh, yes, I know.) Oh, oh, yes, I know.

(Oh, yes, I know.) Oh, oh, yes, I know. Oh, yes, I know.

2 Oh, Jesus.

Jesus is coming.

Oh, yes, I know.

*(Title: Freedom Is Coming; Text & Music: South African; transc. Freedom Is Coming, 1984, Text and music © 1984 Peace of Music Publishing AB, admin. Walton Music Corp., a div. of GIA Publications, Inc., giamusic.com. All rights reserved. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Reprinted and Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-727610. All rights reserved.)*

**Prayers of Intercession:**

A: With hope and expectation, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all who await God’s day of restoration.

*A brief silence.*

You promised mercy to Abraham and Sarah and their descendants forever. Bring your church into thoughtful, caring, and collaborative relationship with those of other faiths. Strengthen our shared values, that we work together in caring for our world. Merciful God,***C:* *receive our prayer****.*

As fields and crops lie dormant, bless them with holy rest. Prepare them to thrive, that they provide abundant food in due season. Protect animals who hibernate and provide for all who scavenge for food in the lean season. Merciful God,***C:* *receive our prayer.***

You raise up the lowly and cast down the arrogant. Teach humility to all in positions of authority. Break down systems of oppression, especially systems that perpetuate inequity and exclusion. Do not allow wealth, power, or pride to become idols that obscure your call to justice. Merciful God,***C:* *receive our prayer.***

Look with favor upon all who cry out to you. Accompany with tenderness all who are afraid or ill (*especially we pray for Linda, Jeff, Sherri, Panagiota, each one of the beloved children on our prayer list, and those we name before you now aloud or silently in our hearts…*). Rescue all who experience abuse or who live under threat of violence, especially refugees, immigrants, and asylum-seekers in search of a safe and stable home. Merciful God,***C:* *receive our prayer.***

We pray for our siblings in Christ. For the people of St Luke’s Anglican Church and their pastor Craigh Love; for the people of St Stephen’s Lutheran Church, Kitchener and their pastor Richard Schwass. Merciful God,***C:* *receive our prayer.***

We pray for Heide and Jann in their service to the Ministry of Vision in Mission. Inspire them, and us, to live into our vision of realizing a healthier world through Jesus. Merciful God,***C:* *receive our prayer.***

Listen to these and all our prayers, O God of hosts, and restore us with your great and everlasting mercy.

**Amen.\***

**Share the peace of Christ:**

Angels said it to startled shepherds,

Jesus said it to frightened followers,

And now these words which come from heaven

are shared to make us whole and make us one.

Peace be with you.

***C: And also with you. \*\*\*\****

*(A Wee Worship Book – Liturgy for Holy Communion A #30810; Type: Words; First Line: Call to worship – Gather us in; Language: English (pages 80-92); Contributors: Iona community; Text: © 1999, WGRG, Iona community, GIA Publications, Inc; exclusive North American agent. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Reprinted and Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-727610. All rights reserved.)*

**Offering**

**Offering Hymn: ELW # 870 ‘We Praise You, O God’**

1 We praise you, O God, our redeemer, creator;

in grateful devotion our tribute we bring.

We lay it before you; we kneel and adore you;

we bless your holy name; glad praises we sing.

2 We worship you, God of our fathers and mothers;

through trial and tempest our guide you have been.

When perils o'ertake us, you will not forsake us,

and with your help, O Lord, our struggles we win.

3 With voices united our praises we offer

and gladly our songs of thanksgiving we raise.

With you, Lord, beside us,

your strong arm will guide us.

To you, our great redeemer, forever be praise!

*(Title: We Praise You, O God; Text: Julia C. Cory, 1882-1963; Public Domain; Music:* *A. Valerius, Nederlandtsch Gedenckclanck, 1626; Public Domain; Reprinted and Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-727610. All rights reserved.)*

**Offering Prayer:**

A: God of all goodness,

generations have turned to you,

gathered around your table,

and shared your abundant blessings.

Number us among them

that, as we gather these gifts from your abundance,

and give thanks for your rich blessings,

we may feast upon your very self

and care for all that you have made,

through Jesus Christ, our Sovereign and Servant.

Amen.\*

You are invited to prepare your table with bread and wine, or crackers and juice, whatever is available to you, so that you may participate in the meal.

**Meal: Click here for the communion liturgy from worship on YouTube:**

[**https://youtu.be/ViXmTzRsfU4**](https://youtu.be/ViXmTzRsfU4)

**Great Thanksgiving: ACS Setting 12: ‘Dialogue…’ (page 36) (sung)**

The Lord be with you. **C: And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **C: We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **C: It is right to give our thanks and praise**

**ACS Setting 12: ‘Preface…’ *(Advent)***

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,

that we should at all times and in all places

give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,

through our Savior Jesus Christ.

You comforted your people with the promise of the Redeemer,

through whom you will also make all things new

in the day when he comes to judge the world in righteousness.

And so, with all the choirs of angels,

with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,

we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**ACS Setting 12: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy…’ *(page 36 )***

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,**

**God of pow’r and God of might,**

**heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna, hosanna in the highest.**

**Hosanna, hosanna in the highest.**\*

**Thanksgiving at the Table:**

On the night before he showed us the full extent of his love,

our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;

broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,

and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood,

shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

**The Lord’s Prayer:**

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those

who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours,

now and forever. **Amen.**

**Invitation to Communion:**

This is Christ’s table. All are welcome here to receive God’s abundant gifts of love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

I invite those at home, and those in the building communing by fellowship cup, to take your bread or cracker as we say together, “The body of Christ, given for us.”

And, as we take our cup we say, “The blood of Christ, shed for us.”

**Communion Music: ACS Setting 12: ‘Be known to us….’ *(page 40 ) &***

**Choir Anthem**

**ACS Setting 12: ‘Be known to us….’ *(page 40 )***

**Be known to us, Lord Jesus, in the breaking of the bread.**

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

**Be known to us, Lord Jesus, in the breaking of the bread.**

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.\***

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**Choir Anthem**

P: May the body and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ strengthen you, and keep you, in his grace.

***C: Amen.***

**Prayer after Communion:**

A: Lord Jesus,

in this simple meal you have set a banquet.

Sustain us on the journey,

strengthen us to care for the least of your beloved children,

and give us glad and generous hearts

as we meet you on the way.

Amen.\*

**Blessing:**

As we watch and wait for God’s truth and justice to break into our world,

our hearts shall sing of God’s goodness,

and of the promise of hope and peace to come.

The God of peace bless you,

the love of Christ sustain you in hope,

and the anointing of the Spirit ☩ remain upon you,

in every ending and every new beginning. Amen.

**Sending Hymn: ELW # 249 ‘On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry’**

1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry

announces that the Lord is nigh;

awake and hearken, for he brings

glad tidings of the King of kings!

2 Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin;

make straight the way for God within,

and let us all our hearts prepare

for Christ to come and enter there.

3 We hail you as our Savior, Lord,

our refuge and our great reward;

without your grace we waste away

like flow'rs that wither and decay.

4 Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,

and make us rise to fall no more;

oh, let your face upon us shine

and fill the world with love divine.

5 All praise to you, eternal Son,

whose advent has our freedom won,

whom with the Father we adore,

and Holy Spirit, evermore.

*(Title: On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry; Text: Text: Charles Coffin, 1676-1749; tr. composite; Public Domain; Music: European tune, adapt. Michael Praetorius, 1571-1621; Public Domain; Reprinted and Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-727610. All rights reserved.)*

**Dismissal:**

A: Beloved of God,

go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

***C: Thanks be to God.***\*

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