



A publication of
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Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 24, 2017

The Fourth Sunday of Advent often focuses on joy. This year, it falls on Christmas Eve! The Magnificat, as found in Luke, is repeated along with the Lukan telling, “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth...” All eyes are likely to already be on the stable and the immigrants walking to Bethlehem to be registered – but there is something to be found in this service that sets it apart: this beautiful passage from Samuel which is our hook for understanding Jesus as the fulfillment of the line of David.

As with Advent 3, the scriptures this week powerfully and clearly connect the coming of Jesus into this world with righteousness, justice, and the overthrowing of corruption. Even as we name Jesus as inheritor of the blessing promised to the House of David, we are reminded that his kingdom and his kingship are inversions of politically powerful reigns. We have the opportunity to ask: how shall we use our riches to build the kingdom of God as followers of Jesus?

We offer this reminder each week because it matters: This word “impoverished” is not used by accident – it indicates that people are made poor, rather than just show up poor. This is a loaded idea, because if people are made poor, one must ask what makes them poor. A congregation that is not yet accustomed to talking about institutional and systemic oppression can learn to wrestle with the reality that Jesus speaks into systems: that his turning over the tables of money changers was simply a concrete example of what he was about.

As you plan for this week, use the suggestions below to craft a service that will help to draw congregants into an Advent full of the expectation that Jesus will upend injustice, inequity, and iniquity, and likewise that Jesus will call us into this very work - in his name.

Scripture Notes

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

- **House of Cedar/Tent**
 - This passage juxtaposes the house of Cedar in which David lives with the tent which houses the ark of the Lord. Cedars are signs of luxury, wafting fragrance throughout the dwelling, likely imported at great expense.
 - David is uncomfortable with the tent-like dwelling that housed the ark and suggested to Nathan that he build a house for the Lord.
 - The Lord tells Nathan to tell David that a permanent dwelling is unnecessary. The idea of a permanent house is turned so that the Lord declares he will make a permanent house for David, which is the line of David from which Jesus is described as descending.
- **Permanent/Transitory**
 - This juxtaposition between the luxurious house of Cedar, which was King David’s dwelling, and the tent, which was the dwelling of the Lord, is about more than luxury and simplicity. It is about permanence and mobility.
 - The tent’s mobility was echoed in the way in which Jesus ministered – always on the move, never seeking a permanent resting place.
 - As Christians called to participate in the kingdom of God, we have the opportunity to ask how we might use our resources and what it is that we are called to build. What does the Lord who has always been on the move require of us?

- Connections to tax reform will challenge worshipers to consider the ways in which they might participate communally in building the kingdom of God rather than building structures and strictures aimed at sheltering a Lord who does not need shelter.

Luke 1:46b-55

- **Magnificat**
 - Mary's Magnificat is a gift of evocative descriptions of the mighty being overthrown.
 - Mercy is for those who fear the Lord rather than the powers and principalities of this world.
 - The Lord's strong arm has scattered the proud when their hearts lust after that which is not God.
 - The descriptions evoke the language of equity found in Isaiah and John: the high will be made low and the low will be raised. Here, the powerful will be brought down and the lowly will be lifted.
 - Furthermore, the hungry are promised being made full, and the rich are promised emptiness.
 - The coming of Jesus is linked to the promises of God made to Abraham and his ancestors.
- Connections to tax reform will name the forces and systems which, though mighty, must be overthrown for the lowly to be lifted and the hungry to be filled with good things.

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

- **Steadfast Love/Faithfulness to all generations**
 - This Psalm's use of the language of "steadfast love," "faithfulness," and "generations," ties it to Psalm 85 (Advent 2), the Magnificat (Advent 3 and 4), Isaiah 61 (Advent 3), and the Lukan birth narrative (Advent 4).
 - This small snippet of a Psalm so clearly names these Advent themes.
- **House of David**
 - This Psalm specifically recounts God's promise to David to establish his descendants and throne for all generations.
 - This Psalm highlights the agency of God in anointing, strengthening, and protecting David.
 - This emphasis on the House of David ties directly to Luke's telling in which he names Jesus as David's ancestor, the inheritor of this promise.
- Connections to tax reform will draw on the significance of Jesus as an inversion of the political power and wealth which King David yielded, and will call those who come to worship the newborn king to tend to the manifestations of steadfast love, faithfulness, and inheritance in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Romans 16:25-27

- **Made Strong**
 - this very short passage from the letter to the Romans is powerful because it invokes God's strength in a new way: through the proclamation of Jesus Christ.
 - Furthermore, this strength draws on revelation and prophetic writings rooted in "long ages," – in generations of promise.

Luke 1:26-38

This is such a familiar passage, yet it contains some elements that are not to be missed:

- **House of David**
 - Luke names Jesus as David's ancestor, the inheritor of God's promise to establish the descendants and throne of David forever.
- **Nothing is Impossible with God**
 - In the midst of a situation that might be written off as hopeless – a barren and aging Elizabeth, a pregnant, unwed, teenaged Mary - the angel of the Lord makes this promise: Nothing is impossible with God. This is a sturdy promise.
 - In the presence of the holy, Mary's response is to give herself to a story of hope and redemption, even at cost to herself.
- Connections to tax reform will, as above, draw on the significance of Jesus as an inversion of the political power and wealth which King David yielded, and will call those who come to worship the newborn king to tend to the manifestations of steadfast love, faithfulness, and inheritance in the life and ministry of Jesus. Furthermore, connections to tax reform will call worshippers to respond to the promise that nothing is impossible with God by dreaming of, and working for, the hope and redemption found in the economy of goods and the economy of grace which Jesus lived.

Suggested Sermon/Service Themes

Strong

- The Scripture passages for this week describe God as strong. God's strength protects King David; it scatters the proud, brings down the powerful, and raises the lowly; and, in Romans, God strengthens believers through the gospel of Jesus.
- What it means for God to show strength changes with the Lordship of Jesus so that rather than being used to crush enemies, "strength" is used to forge equity where there is inequity.
- A "strong economy," is one to which our policy makers generally aspire. What might an economy based on the strength of the gospel of Jesus look like?

Here I am, the servant of the Lord

- Mary's response to the angel Gabriel should not be overlooked as trite or familiar.
- This response changes the entire trajectory of her life.
- She takes on the responsibility of nurturing the coming Kingdom of God.
- Those who dare to say "Here I am," to God must face the reality that seemingly impossible things may be required. Christians must ask difficult questions about the ways in which the trajectory of our lives ought to be altered, and what our role must be in nurturing the coming Kingdom of God.

Worship Resources

Responsive Reading 1 (using Magnificat and Romans 16:25-27)

One: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Many: We are made strong by the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

One: The Lord has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts and has brought down the powerful from their thrones.

Many: We are made strong by the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

One: The Lord has lifted up the lowly and has filled the hungry with good things.

Many: We are made strong by the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

One: The Lord has sent the rich away empty.

Many: We are made strong by the proclamation of Jesus Christ,

All: to whom the be the glory forever. Amen.

Responsive Reading 2 (using 2 Samuel, Luke 1, and Once in Royal David's City).

One: To King David, God promised:

Many: Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me;

All: your throne shall be established forever.

One: To Mary, the angel promised:

Many: The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David.

All: He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

One: Christ came down to earth from heaven, love incarnate for us all,

Many: And his shelter was a stable, and his cradle was a stall.

All: with the poor, the scorned, the lowly, lived on earth our Savior holy.

Confession 1

God we struggle to hold the brokenness of the world and the hope of Christ the newborn king together in our hearts. Observances of the creche are quiet and peaceful only if the church doors are closed. Our carols are out of synch with the cacophony of our newscasts. We strain to harmonize our worship, our festivities, and our observances of pain and need. The light, the dark, the beautiful hope, the ugly realities, the celebration, the joy, the grief, and the fear all collide and in the raging waters we strain and stretch to plant our feet upon a rock. Come quickly Lord Jesus and strengthen us; empower us; embolden us. Forgive us our trespasses. Make us brave. Let us, like Mary, open ourselves to you so that we might whisper above the raging: Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Amen.

Confession 2

God who has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty, forgive us for we too often fill the rich and let the poor go away empty. God who has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly, forgive us for we too often tear down the most fragile among us and lift powerful with pomp and honor. God who has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, forgive us for we are too often proud, and we too often make accommodation for the proud among us. Teach us to remember your mercy. Amen.

Suggested Hymns and Worship Songs:

Angels from the Realms of Glory

Angels We Have Heard on High

Blessed Be the God of Israel

Build Your Kingdom Here (Rend Collective)

Christians All, Your Lord is Coming

Come, O Long-expected Jesus

From Heaven Above (tune: Von Himmel Hoch)

Joy to the World

Love Came Down

My Soul Magnifies the Lord (Chris Tomlin)

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Once in Royal David's City

One Candle Is Lit

People, Look East

Prepare the Way of the Lord (Taize)

Turning Over Tables (The Brilliance)