

HYMNS: 14 7 431 633

THE LIGHTING OF THE FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE

R: The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a Son,

C: and she will call His name 'Immanuel' which means, 'God is with us.'

ALL: Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have sent Your Son Jesus to be with us and to save us. Teach us to live as Your people, and to serve you joyfully. Amen.

INTROIT: Psalm 80:1-7

Listen to us, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock. You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up Your strength; and come to save us.

O God, restore us, and cause Your face to shine, that we may be saved.

O LORD God of hosts, how long will You smoulder in anger against the prayer of Your people?

You have made them eat the bread of tears, and You have given them tears to drink three times over.

You make us a source of conflict to our neighbours, and our enemies are laughing among themselves.

O God of hosts, restore us, and cause Your face to shine, that we may be saved.

COLLECT: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins that weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS: Micah 5:2-5a The time when a mother will have a Child.
Hebrews 10:5-10 You have prepared a body for Me.
Luke 1:39-55 Blessed is the Child who will come.

Micah 5:2-5a

² However, **although you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, are too small** to be **among** the clans of **Judah**, yet **out of you One who will be the Ruler over Israel will come forth** for Me. His origins are from of old, from the days of eternity. ³ Therefore, He will give them up until the time when a woman in labour has a Child. Then the rest of His brothers will return to the people of Israel. ⁴ He will stand **and shepherd** His flock with the strength of the LORD, with the majesty of the name of the LORD, His God. They will live securely, for then His greatness will reach as far as the ends of the earth. ⁵ He will be a man of peace.

Hebrews 10:5-10

⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said: “**You have not wanted sacrifice and offering but have prepared a body for Me.**” ⁶ **You have had no pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin.** ⁷ Then I said: ‘**Look! I have come (It has been written about Me in the scroll of the book). I have come to do Your will, O God.**’” ⁸ First Christ says: “**You have not wanted sacrifices, offerings, burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin,**” which are offered according to the Law, and “**You have had no pleasure in them.**” ⁹ Then He has said, “**Look! I have come to do Your will.**” He does away with the first, to establish the second. ¹⁰ **By this will** we have been made holy, through the **sacrifice of the body** of Jesus Christ once and for all.

Luke 1:39-56

³⁹ In those days Mary got ready and hurried to a city of Judah in the hill-country. ⁴⁰ She went into Zacharias’ home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and exclaimed in a loud voice: “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the Child who will come from your womb! ⁴³ Why, then, does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For indeed, as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped with delight in my womb. ⁴⁵ Moreover, blessed is she who has believed that the Lord will accomplish what He has promised to do for her!” ⁴⁶ Mary said, ⁴⁷ “**My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God, my Saviour,**” ⁴⁸ because He **has looked kindly on the humble state** of His **servant**. For look! From now on all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and **His name is holy;** ⁵⁰ and **He is merciful to those who fear Him throughout all generations.** ⁵¹ He has

performed mighty deeds **with His arm. He has scattered** those who have proud thoughts in their hearts. ⁵² **He has brought strong rulers down** from their thrones but has **exalted lowly people.** ⁵³ **He has filled hungry people with good things** but has sent rich people away empty. ⁵⁴ **He has come to help His servant Israel, so that He has remembered to be merciful,** ⁵⁵ **to Abraham and his descendants for ever, as He has promised our fathers.”**

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then went back home.

MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD
Sermon for the 4th Sunday in Advent 2024
Luke 1:39-56

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon is the Gospel read before Luke 1:39-56:

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

As we move closer toward Christmas, it's time to greet the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. But not only do we prepare for His coming in the flesh, but also for when He comes again. Therefore, are you ready and prepared? How will you greet Him?

Our text today teaches us how to greet Jesus when He comes. It teaches us to welcome Him *in faith*. What does that mean, “in faith”? And where does that faith come from? Let's find out.

In Luke chapter 1, we see three persons greeting the coming of the Saviour, and they all greet Him the same way: in faith and joy, with a faith generated by the Holy Spirit. And that is how we shall greet Jesus, too: in faith and joy, with a faith generated by the Holy Spirit. The three persons we find in our text doing so are Elizabeth, John, and Mary. The Holy Spirit will give us the same faith and joy He gave them. So, let's look at each of them, one at a time.

First, let's look at Elizabeth.

Who was she? Elizabeth was the wife of a man named Zacharias. Some Bible translations name him as Zechariah—it's the same person. Zacharias and Elizabeth were an older couple and well past childbearing years. Even so, the

angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias and told him that he and Elizabeth would finally have a child after all these years. He would be a special child who would go before the Lord to prepare His way. Gabriel told Zacharias: *“Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him ‘John.’¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will be glad when he is born. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord.... He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb”* (Luke 1:15). So that’s who Elizabeth is. She will be the mother of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. And when Elizabeth did fall pregnant, in faith, she said, *“The Lord has dealt with me in this way at a time when He has looked with favour on me”* (Luke 1:25).

Meanwhile, the angel Gabriel has made another appearance to announce the birth of another special child. This time, Gabriel appeared to a young woman named Mary.

Let’s take a close look now at Mary.

Gabriel told Mary that she, too, would give birth to a son in a miraculous way. This child would be even greater than John: *“You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a Son, and you shall call His name ‘Jesus.’ He will be great and will be called ‘the Son of the Most High.’ Moreover, the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. He will reign over the family of Jacob for ever, and there will be no end of His kingdom”* (Luke 1:31-33). Mary doesn’t know how this can be, since she was still a virgin. Gabriel tells her: *“The Holy Spirit will come over you, and the Power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, also the Holy One who is conceived will be called ‘the Son of God.’ In addition, look! Your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her, whom people used to call barren. For nothing will be impossible with God”* (Luke 1:35-37). Mary remarkably receives all this startling news in faith and says, *“Look! I am the Lord’s servant. May it happen to me as you have said!”* (v. 38).

So now we have these two women, Elizabeth and Mary, both carrying a special child in their womb: Elizabeth, bearing John, and Mary, bearing Jesus. The Holy Spirit has given Elizabeth and Mary each the gift of faith to receive the word of the Lord in humility and joy. Now, the stories intersect: Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, who is about six months old.

“³⁹ In those days Mary got ready and hurried to a city of Judah in the hill-country. ⁴⁰ She went into Zacharias’ home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and exclaimed in a loud voice: “Blessed are

you among women and blessed is the Child who will come from your womb!
⁴³ Why, then, does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For indeed, as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped with delight in my womb. ⁴⁵ Moreover, blessed is she who has believed that the Lord will accomplish what He has promised to do for her!”

Here is Spirit-given faith all around! Notice that Elizabeth hears the greeting from Mary, and Elizabeth is “**filled with the Holy Spirit.**” She is given the gift of faith to recognise what the Lord was doing through Mary. She calls Mary the most blessed of women because of the child she is carrying: “**Blessed are you among women and blessed is the Child who will come from your womb!**” The fruit of Mary’s womb, of course, is Jesus, and the Spirit reveals to Elizabeth that this child is, in fact, the Lord—Elizabeth’s Lord, as she says: “**Why, then, does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?**”

So, by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth is given the faith to recognise, receive, and rejoice in the presence of her Lord and Saviour, little Jesus, still in Mary’s womb. But it’s not just Elizabeth who has this Spirit-given faith. It’s even the little baby in her womb, John.

He is the third person for us to look at.

John, too, rejoices in faith at the coming of Christ. Elizabeth tells Mary: “**For indeed, as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped with delight in my womb.**” That is most remarkable. Here is John, preborn, greeting Jesus in joy! He leaps in the womb when Mary’s greeting comes to Elizabeth. In this case, even a little baby still in the womb is given the gift of faith to acknowledge the presence of Christ.

But should this surprise us? Remember, the angel Gabriel had told Zacharias that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit, *even from his mother’s womb.* And here is the evidence: John leaps for joy, even in Elizabeth’s womb.

By the way, this passage tells us a couple of things that are relevant for our day. One is that what a woman carries in her womb is, in fact, a baby, *even from conception.* Yes, it’s a baby in there, a human baby, a distinct human life that has been begun, not just a blob of tissue that can be disposed of by abortion. This passage serves as a powerful pro-life text.

The other thing is that God can give the Holy Spirit, and thus faith, *even to infants.* You don’t have to wait until someone comes to some man-invented “age of accountability” before a child can believe in the Saviour. God can give this

miracle of faith even to an infant. The Holy Spirit works through the Word, connected to Holy Baptism, to give faith, yes, to little children.

John has been given the Holy Spirit, and he leaps for joy when Jesus comes into the room. So there is Elizabeth and John, both greeting the Saviour with Spirit-given faith.

But there's something about Mary, also. She, too, has been given the gift of faith—perhaps she, more than anyone. After all, she was given the most amazing news that she, of all people, would be the mother of the Messiah Himself. About Mary and about the gift of faith she has been given, Elizabeth says: **“Moreover, blessed is she who has believed that the Lord will accomplish what He has promised to do for her!”**

Luther thought this was an even greater miracle than the Virgin Mary becoming pregnant. Mary was given the gift of faith to believe all this! And so it is for us. Like Mary, Elizabeth, and John, we have had a miracle occur in our lives. The Holy Spirit has worked through the Word to give us the gift of faith in our Saviour. Think of it. We have never seen Jesus, yet we believe. We are trusting in Him for our salvation. This is truly a miracle. It is a gift of God that we have this faith, this Spirit-given faith in Christ our Saviour.

And thank God we do! For this is the only way to be saved, namely, through faith in Christ. The good news of who Jesus is and what He has done for us—this Gospel Word comes to us in preaching and teaching, in Holy Baptism and in the Sacrament of the Altar, and we hear, receive, and believe. It's a miracle! It's a gift! The Apostle writes, *“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17). Again, in Ephesians 2:8: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”* The Holy Spirit works through the living, active Word of God to bring us to faith and to keep us in the faith. As we have learned in the Catechism, under the Third Article: *“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”*

It is the true faith, and ***it is the only faith that saves because it is faith in the only Saviour there is.*** There is no other. No one else can save us except our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He is God coming in the flesh to do the rescue mission only God can do: to save us from our sins. We could not save ourselves from our guilt and the judgment it deserves. We could never do enough. But Jesus has done the saving job for us: coming as our brother, living the sinless life we have not lived, the Son of God, then carrying our guilt and our shame and our sins to the

cross, there to suffer and die in our place. And then He rises from the dead, to show that the victory has been won! Here is the Saviour we need! Here is the Saviour we have!

And here He is today, present in our midst, and we greet Him in faith, humility, and joy! Jesus is speaking to us today, and the Holy Spirit confirms that word in our hearts. And Jesus is coming again, on the Last Day, to gather His church and to take us home. On that day, we shall once again rejoice and even leap to greet our Saviour! On that day, faith will give way to sight, and we shall join Elizabeth, John, and Mary in her song of praise and joy: **“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God, my Saviour!”** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Heavenly Father, all things in heaven and on earth reveal Your glory and show clearly what You have done. But we now thank You in particular for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the salvation You have provided for all people through His sacrificial obedience. We confidently bring our prayers before You in His loving name.

We stand before You with repentant hearts. We acknowledge our many sins. Forgive us for Jesus' sake. Make us more alert to both right and wrong before You. Deliver us from our pet sins, and from those that continually cause us to fall. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, purify the words we speak, and guide everything we do in obedience to Jesus. Heal and renew us. Assure us of Your forgiveness through Jesus' holy, priestly work, that we may possess Your peace, which is beyond all human understanding.

We pray for all people everywhere. Let Your Holy Spirit rule in every home and school, in every shop and office, and in every area of labour and industry. Open the eyes of the nations that people everywhere may see Your glory. Overthrow those who oppose the Gospel of Your Son. Support all who are persecuted for His sake, and prosper all who love Your truth. Be with the fatherless, the homeless, and the comfortless, and lead them to trust You in all their troubles. Send them help that will draw them to You, and will lead them to confess the name of Jesus.

Make Your face to shine on the wounded in spirit, the sick in mind, and the distressed in heart. Protect and bless with Your presence all travellers, and all who are away from home in any service or calling. We pray for captives and prisoners, for the depressed and the lonely, and for all in danger of body and soul.

Comfort them with Your presence and help. Be gracious to those among us who are sick and aged, to those who are suffering, to those who are bereaved and those who are dying. Give them all the perfect peace that Jesus has won for them.

Make our hearts a fit dwelling-place for Your Son, that we may know the joy of His presence, and the blessing of following in His steps. And finally give us the glorious crown You have promised to those who cling to Him in firm and patient faith, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Article: Why did Jesus Come at Christmas Time?

How do we answer the above question?

A simple but excellent answer to the question is to say that He came to save us. We can elaborate on that in various ways depending on who's listening. A small child will need to be taught what the word "save" means. A pastoral conference, however, will be interested in something deeper, possibly an in-depth study of Hebrew or Greek texts.

Scripture itself answers "Why did Jesus come into the world at Christmas" in many ways—each with a different emphasis, a specific focus, or a nuance that gives us a special "aha" moment!

Consider the following:

"The saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the chief" (1 Timothy 1:15)

This answer is universal. Every honest, penitent sinner can identify with it. Christ Jesus came into the world (Christmas) to rescue everyone from their sins—yes, even the very worst sinners!

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets! I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Matthew 5:17).

Jesus came (Christmas) to fulfil for us what we were required to do but never could. More than that, He fulfilled every Gospel-centred prophecy and promise!

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us. For the Scriptures have said, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).

He has delivered us from the curse we deserved! Notice that the Apostle didn't merely say Christ experienced the curse instead of us; he said Christ actually *became a curse*. He was so immersed in that curse that He became the curse—personified! What an astonishing reason for Christ coming into the world (Christmas)!

“Therefore, since the children have shared in blood and flesh, He also in just the same way participated in the same things, that, through His death, He might destroy the one who has power over death, that is, the Devil,¹⁵ and that He might release all those who were subjected to slavery all their lives by fear of death” (Hebrews 2:14-15)

The infant in the manger was flesh and blood (Christmas), even as we are. He came to die, that through His death He would destroy the devil who, through deception, made death our reality. Jesus, however, undid what happened to us, making life our reality. Jesus Himself is the resurrection and the life—personified (John 11:25)!

“See what great love the Father has given to us, that we are called “the children of God”! That is what we are” (1 John 3:1)

How did God bestow His love on us? He gave His only-begotten Son (Christmas)! The Father's love was laser-focused on making us His very own children. Jesus made it happen.

“His love has been brought to maturity with us in this, that we have confidence on the Day of Judgment” (1 John 4:17a)

The expression *“has been brought to maturity”* means “has been brought to its goal.” Judgement Day is a very unsettling (terrifying) day for sinners! The ultimate goal of Jesus coming into the world (Christmas) was being able to welcome us, on the Last Day, into the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34)! Embrace as your very own, therefore, what the angel said: *“Stop being afraid! For look! I am bringing you Good News of great joy”* (Luke 2:10)

Ready for more good tidings? Jesus promised He's coming again!

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20)

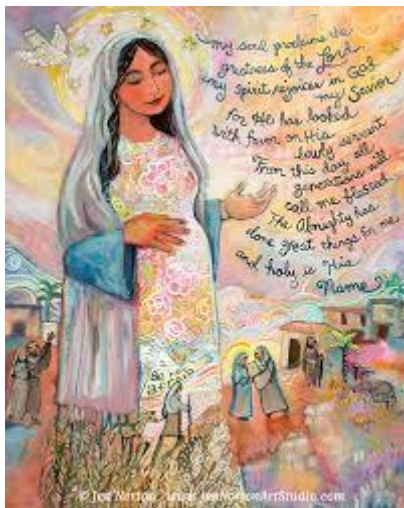
Children's Message:

How many days until Christmas? We're getting close, aren't we! Almost time to celebrate baby Jesus being born!

We know who Jesus' mother was, right? Yes, His mother was Mary, who was so excited about being the mother of the Saviour that she sang a wonderful song we call the *Magnificat*.

Before Mary became the mother of Jesus, was she a famous person? No, she wasn't. She lived in a little town most people had never visited. She was really young. Nobody around had ever heard of Mary before.

So why did God choose her to be the mother of the Saviour? Well, God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus, our Saviour, not because she was anybody great. He chose her because He is so loving and caring for everybody—including especially people who aren't all that special. He loves people



who are sinners, who haven't done anything to show that they're great. In fact, when people sin, they show that they're very ungreat—that nobody should really give them anything good, but only punish them. And God's love for people who aren't great, who are sinners, is the very reason God sent Jesus into the world to be born at all. You know, Mary's baby Jesus was great—He's God!—but He didn't act as if He was great. He was poor, like His mum. He didn't show off. And He even let people kill Him, nail Him to the cross, where He looked as if He was really ungreat, looked as if He was the worst sinner. But His dying on the cross took away our sins, so we get to be great with God forever.

Do you ever feel as if you're not so great? Do you know that you're a sinner? You are. But now you are great because of Jesus, and you're going to be great forever in heaven!

Well, Mary's song, the Magnificat, is about that. When you have some free time, take out your Bibles and read the words of Mary's song. You'll find the words in Luke 1:46-55.

Thank You, Jesus, for being born of Mary. When I feel as though I am no one special, remind me that I am great in Your kingdom because You love me so much! Amen.

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

| 25 December Christmas Day | 29 December 1 Christmas | 1 January 2025 New Year' Day |
|--|--|---|
| 7.30am MARBURG HC 8.30am TMBA LR 10.00am OAK HC | 8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN HC 10.45am AUB HC 9.00am LOWOOD LR Downs members: Please note the change | 10.00am AUB HC |
| Wednesday, 25 December | | |
| READINGS: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-14 | | |
| HYMNS: 25 624 627 34 33 634 | | |
| Sunday, 29 December | | |
| READINGS: Exodus 13:1-3a, 11-15; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:22-40 | | |
| HYMNS: 46 26 44 (22 364) 29 | | |
| Wednesday, 1 January 2025 | | |
| READINGS: Number 6:22-27; Galatians 3:23-27; Luke 2:21 | | |
| HYMNS: 161 36 324 151 (tune 67) 291 508 | | |

Please take home with you today a copy of the 2025 Service Schedule, and Pastor's Christmas Letter.

Christmas Day: Downs members, please place your offering in envelopes marked back to your own congregation.