

**First Sunday of Advent  
Dec 3, 2023**

**GATHERING**

**Welcome**

**Life and Work of the Church**

**Acknowledgement of the Land**

**Advent Wreath: Lighting of the first Candle-Hope:**

*(as one blue candle is lit)*

We light a candle for Hope.

As the flame of hope begins to burn,  
let the promise of the ages  
shine in our hearts.

Just as the great star shone  
so long ago in Bethlehem,

Let your Spirit burn in our hearts O God;  
let your Light shine in our world;  
Let your Star of Hope lead us.

Amen.

**Advent Candle Song “ A Candle is Burning” VU #6 vs. 1**

1 A candle is burning, a flame warm and bright,  
a candle of hope in December's dark night.  
While angels sing blessings from heaven's starry sky,  
our hearts we prepare now for Jesus is nigh.

**Opening Prayer (together)**

**Holy God, You come as light,**

**grace-filled yet baby frail.  
May our hearts cradle you,  
our voices sing to you,  
our spirits leap to you,  
and our hearts dance with you.  
Amen**

**Opening Hymn: O Come, O Come Emmanuel VU #1 vs 1 & 2**

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lowly exile here  
until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,  
who orders all things mightily;  
to us the path of knowledge show,  
and teach us in her ways to go. R

**Prayer of Approach:**

O Holy One—  
you who are re-discovered within the darkness of the womb—  
Help us to learn the mysteries of life  
that are obscured by bright lights and frivolity.  
Help us to slow down for Christmas,  
that we might attend truly and deeply  
to the birth of Christ within us.  
Amen.

LISTENING

**Scripture reading: Mark 13: 5-13, 31-37**

## **Hymn for Reflection: Hope is a Star VU #7**

### **Sermon: Birth Pangs of a New Humanity**

**an Advent sermon for the faith communities of the Lake of Bays  
Pastoral Charge based on Mark 13 Written by Rev Meg Jordan**

Keeping Advent, the Season of “Already and Not Yet,” is a little bit like being pregnant in a busy, noisy, intense world that has no idea that inside you is growing a tender, precious new life. This new life already has an existence that needs to be protected and nurtured and yet, to all extents and purposes is not yet in the world. In my experience, preparing for the birth of a child is also a little bit like Advent—life just carries on around you unaware of the astounding miracle that is happening right in our midst. In the consumer world of Christmas—jingle bells and lights and presents and Santa Claus and angels and stars and movies and presents and presents and presents—Advent has been taken over. The already but “not yet” aspect of it seems to be completely lost. In the church we say that we remember Jesus as “the reason for the season” and we celebrate his birth at Christmas but really, along with the rest of the world, we tend to lose sight of the pregnancy aspect—the pain and indeed the danger of those birth pangs. We know there is unfinished business which is why in the church we start Advent with readings about end times—and the so called “second coming of Jesus”. And in Mark’s gospel the passage which we heard today is the only mention of a birth and the pangs of birth associated with Jesus. There is indeed something being born but there is no story of the birth of a child. From the time when the Gospels were written right up until our present time—there is a sense that something was indeed begun with Jesus’ birth but it is still to be accomplished. The fulfillment of the work

of Jesus and God's dream of a peaceable kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven" is yet to come. And so we today, in a world caught up yet again with the horrors of war, we hope against hope!

Our passage today tells us that we need to stay awake and alert because we do not know when the time will be—AND our passage today tells us that all the troubles and sufferings that we see in the world are BIRTH PANGS for what is to come. One thing we know for sure—if labour is happening then a birth is about to happen. Perhaps, after all these years, we should consider the possibility that the second coming is not actually about the literal return in the clouds of the human being named Jesus who lived and died and rose again so long ago. Perhaps what we're waiting for is the emergence of a truly new way of being human. Perhaps it is God who is waiting for us to finally evolve into the human beings we are intended to be— the Christic human, the human being who has awoken to his or her identity as a Spirit-filled presence on this Earth, and just as Jesus was, to become a creative, redemptive force in the world.

Yes, we are waiting—and indeed we are hoping, just as God too is waiting and hoping-- for this new birth to happen. God is waiting for the emergence of human beings who will consent to letting the heart and mind that was in Jesus of Nazareth animate their own souls. "You will do even greater things" said the Jesus of John's gospel.

So, in this Advent season, rather than allowing ourselves to get into a consumer frenzy, (which I know none of us are doing), we might find ways to allow the longer days of the deepening darkness to become a womb for the birth of this new humanity.

With the life of Jesus of Nazareth our world has experienced what is possible for humanity. He represents the breaking forth of a new order of humanity, a new potential for the fulfillment of God's dream for a world of true peace—a world of justice and joy.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Christ child in 2023, let us take time in our lives and our communities to prepare room for the new Christ life that is being born—right here and right now.

May it be so.

### **Call for Offering**

#### **Offering “Grant us God the grace of giving” VU#540**

Grant us, God, the grace of giving,  
with a spirit large and free,  
that ourselves and all our living  
we may offer faithfully.

### **Offertory/Prayer of Dedication**

#### **Prayers of the People (based on the traditional collect for Advent 1—“Stir up your people O God.”**

Leader: Stir up your power and come:

**People: Be born anew in us.**

Holy God, we enter this new church year with song, wreath and lessons. Stir up in us a yearning heart, an open mind, a spirit seeking your Spirit as company for our journey of faith. And when the day of birth for Jesus finally comes, may He be born as well in each of us.

Leader: Stir up your power and come:

**People: Be born anew in us.**

Lord Jesus Christ, through God's Wisdom, you have been here from the beginning, you have been here in time, and now you come to us in this very hour. You remind us about yet another day, and another hour, another coming of which no one knows the moment.. You bid us to be ready.

Leader: Stir up your power and come:

**People: Be born anew in us.**

We bring before you, Holy Spirit, all that would rob us of the joy of Jesus' coming. We invite you to help us reduce of all the temporal and earthly concerns of this season, so that we may truly focus upon your presence with us—God incarnate, God in flesh, God for real, God with us now.

Leader: Stir up your power and come:

**People: Be born anew in us.**

Known to us, Lord, are persons with needs beyond our own ability to fix. We thank you for all who attend to the sick, the weary, and the ones who feel alone—separated from you, the church, even each other. Hear our prayers for those whom we care for who need a special measure of your grace. Come to them and be their healer.

Leader: Stir up your power and come:

**People: Be born anew in us.**

In a world of rich resources, help us remember those who live in the margins of our world, not only in memory, but also in love, for they are our brothers and sisters. Use our caring, giving, helping, and living with them as ways to be your incarnation. And may we see you incarnate in them.

Leader: Stir up your power and come:

**People: Be born anew in us.**

We pray for peace in our world. We yearn, O God, for the day when nations shall beat their swords into plowshares. We yearn for the day when we can all walk in the gentle light of Christ. We look to Jesus Christ, who lived another way, taught a different lesson, emanated the Holy Spirit, and died a sacrificial death. He shone his light so that we might shine ours.

Leader: Stir up your power and come:

**People: Be born anew in us.**

**Closing Hymn: This Little Light of Mine.**

Everywhere I go

All in my house

Down in the dark OR All around the world

**Commissioning and Benediction**

**May the grace of our lord Jesus Christ**

**And the love of God**

**And the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit**

**Be with us all now, and always. Amen**