

Gettysburg United Methodist Church

December 8, 2020

Instead of a psalm this week, we're using the song that the Holy Spirit gave to Zechariah after the birth of his son, John the Baptist.

Luke 1:67-79

(NRSV)

⁶⁷ *Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:*

⁶⁸ *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.*

⁶⁹ *He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David,*

⁷⁰ *as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,*

⁷¹ *that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.*

⁷² *Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,*
and has remembered his holy covenant,

⁷³ *the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,*
to grant us ⁷⁴ *that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,*
might serve him without fear,

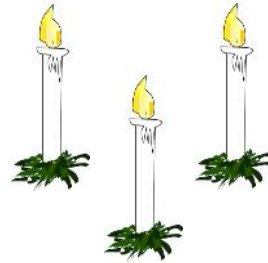
⁷⁵ *in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

⁷⁶ *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;*
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷ *to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.*

⁷⁸ *By the tender mercy of our God,*
the dawn from on high will break upon us,

⁷⁹ *to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,*
to guide our feet into the way of peace."



In-Person Worship to Continue

Last week we received a letter from Bishop Park urgently asking all of the churches of our Conference to suspend worship services for the rest of December. His request was not in response to any mandate from the state. The bishop was solely motivated by his concern for the health and well-being of all people in the face of rapidly increasing diagnoses of COVID cases in our region. He did not mandate that churches suspend worship, however, and understands that this is a very difficult decision for congregations to make, especially at Christmas.

After seeking input from our Sunday morning congregation and others within the church, our Worship Committee has decided to continue to hold in-person worship services on Sunday mornings. Since everyone's circumstances are different, we encourage every person and every family to make their own decision concerning attendance. We respect and honor whatever decision you choose to make for yourself and for your family. Online worship services will continue to be posted to our Facebook page every Sunday, and this mailing will continue on a weekly basis. The Worship Committee will re-evaluate this decision in the beginning of January.

THE WORSHIP COMMITTEE URGENTLY REMINDS PEOPLE WHO ATTEND WORSHIP IN PERSON TO FOLLOW ALL SAFETY PROTOCOLS, INCLUDING MASKS, USE OF HAND SANITIZER, AND ESPECIALLY SOCIAL DISTANCING. Please be sure to keep a minimum of six feet between you and other people at all times when you are in the church.

If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Rick or our Lay Leader, Larry Speer.

Jesus is the Light.

Meditation

Read John 1:1-14

I've always enjoyed the lights of Christmas. The square in Gettysburg is beautifully decorated in light at this time of the year, and there are so many other Christmas lights to enjoy around town. People put up a great variety of Christmas lights—from white lights that are beautiful in their simplicity to multi-colored displays. There are reindeer and Santas (and even some Grinches) that light up, as well as polar bears and snowmen and, of course Christmas trees. I'm tempted to drive around the various neighborhoods in town just to see the amazing variety of beautiful lights.

It's no coincidence that we celebrate Christmas with light. It comes at the darkest time of the year, just a few days after the winter solstice. The Bible doesn't tell us when Jesus was actually born; it was the church in the early fourth century that decided to celebrate his birth on Dec. 25. It's the darkest time of the year, yet Jesus is the light of the world. Christmas celebrates the coming of his light into our darkness.

I think that's why I enjoy Christmas lights so much. They are a constant reminder that Jesus is the light of the world, that he has come to dispel the spiritual darkness that surrounds us, and that darkness can never overcome his love.

Our hearts can be darkened by sin. Sin is anything that separates us from God—doing things that hurt others or ourselves, disobeying God's will, not being the person God created us to be, and/or trusting in ourselves rather than in God. Sin stands in the way of our relationship with God, and blocks our ability to perceive God's light in our lives. Jesus is the one who forgives our sin and restores our relationship with God through his death on the cross. We receive the light of forgiveness solely by his grace as we have faith in him.

Sometimes our hearts are darkened by personal despair. We feel overwhelmed by all of the prob-

lems and concerns of life. We lose hope, and we're ready to give up. But the light of Jesus reminds us that he has a plan and a purpose, and that he has prepared the way before us. He is the good shepherd, and his light goes with us even in the valley of the darkest shadows. God does not cause the darkness of our lives, but his light is able to overcome it.

Often the darkness doesn't come from within us; it comes from outside us. We feel the burden of darkness that others carry as we see all the problems and suffering of the world. Perhaps we see inequality or oppression, perhaps hunger or homelessness, perhaps injustice, perhaps sickness and grief. Since we love others we seek to bear their burdens with them, and find ourselves overwhelmed with the darkness of their lives. COVID-19 has added an additional dimension of suffering and grief. The darkness seems to be growing stronger.

But the light of Christ's love dispels the darkness that surrounds us. Jesus' love gives us strength. Jesus' promised return give us hope. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability and wisdom to work against the darkness of the world. In Christ's love we feed the hungry and house the homeless. We strive to end injustice and prejudice as we work for freedom and equality for all. We comfort those who suffer loss and experience despair. By God's grace, we love others as we love ourselves.

Jesus tells us that we are the light of the world (Matt. 5:14-16). He calls us to let our light shine before others, that our good deeds may glorify our Father in heaven. When Jesus' light shines through our hearts, there is no darkness that can overcome it.

There are times when we need others to help us walk in the light. The light of only one person is never sufficient. We need others to help bear our burdens, and others to shine light on the darkness of our lives. If you feel overwhelmed by darkness, don't try to face it alone. Talk about it with someone else—a trusted friend or family member, or perhaps a counselor or a pastor. Keep an eye out for dark-

(Continued on page 3)

Let us walk in the Light of Christ.

(Continued from page 2)

ness others, and be there for them in their struggles. One light bulb by itself casts very little light; but several strings of Christmas lights can illuminate a house, or even an entire block. The greater the darkness, the more we need each other's light.

As you enjoy the Christmas lights, remember their deeper meaning. Jesus is the incarnation of God's light, and there is no darkness that can withstand his love. In him, we are the light of the world. May God's light burn ever more brightly in our hearts.

Pastor Rick



Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you are the light of the world and the light of our lives. Shine brightly in our hearts and dispel the darkness we experience. Guide us by your Holy Spirit, and grant us grace to go where you lead.

May your light shine brightly on all who walk in darkness. Heal those who are sick, comfort those who grieve, and lift up all who dwell in despair. Make us instruments of your love as you use us to bring your light into the world.

Give us strength throughout the days and weeks ahead. Enable us to celebrate the joy of Christmas every day as we remember that your light has conquered all darkness. May all we do and all we say bring glory to your name; through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Weekly Prayer Concerns

To add someone to this prayer list, please call the church office.

This week's list (as of 12/7/2020) is:

Joyce Dye
Rodney Truscott
Dale Shade—recovering from surgery
Penny Daugherty
Scott Bowers
Imogene Hunt's brother
Raymond Koenig (York Hospital)
Cathy Libera

Members in Assisted Living / Skilled Care Homes:

Edith Bulman (SpiriTust Lutheran, York);
Shirley Hammond (Morning Glory, Littlestown); Missy Legay (Moul Home, York); Bob Reed (Lorien, Mt Airy, MD); Peggy Reynolds (Quincy-cottage, Waynesboro); Gloria Swingler (Country Meadows-apartment, Mechanicsburg)

Members with Limited Mobility:

Butch Carter, Betty Cook, Joyce Dye, Barbara Evans, Pearl Keckler, Raymond Koenig, Chuck Lutz, Ruth Anna Polley, Wilma Schai-ble, Betty Schulteis, June Spencer, Virginia White

We greatly appreciate your continued faithful donations to GUMC during this time of change and crisis. Your faithfulness has enabled us to continue to pay all of our expenses, and we are very grateful for your continued generosity.

Christmas Card Mailboxes

Due to the increased number of cases of COVID-19, we will not have Christmas card mailboxes at the church this year. We look forward to having them again next Christmas.

HYMN

Angels We Have Heard on High

Traditional French Carol

1 Angels we have heard on high
sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and the mountains in reply
echoing their joyous strains.

Refrain:

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

2 Shepherds, why this jubilee?

Why your joyous strains prolong?

What the gladsome tidings be

which inspire your heavenly song? (Refrain)

3 Come to Bethlehem and see
Christ whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the newborn King. (Refrain)

4 See him in a manger laid,
whom the choirs of angels praise;

Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,

while our hearts in love we raise. (Refrain)

The names of the writers of the words and music of *Angels We Have Heard on High* are lost to history. The carol was first published in 1855 in *Nouveau Recueil de Cantiques*, a compilation of French songs and carols. There are several variations of the text from the same period. The tune first appeared in connection with this text. The carol has been included in Methodist hymnals since 1935.

The chorus "Gloria, in excelsis Deo!" means "Glory to God in the highest!" It is taken from the Latin version of the song the angels sang at Jesus' birth in Luke 2:14. The carol invites us to "come to Bethlehem and see" the newborn King for ourselves, and to join the angels in their joyous song of "Gloria, in excelsis Deo!" The carol is found in our hymnal as No. 238

Crisis Hotlines and Helplines

During these trying times, it's good to be aware of some of the positive resources available in our community. Many people are under extraordinary stress because of the ongoing situation. Please feel free to share this information with others as you feel appropriate.

CONTACT Helpline: (800) 932-4616

Wellspan Behavioral Health Helpline (Philhaven):
(800) 932-0359

TrueNorth Crisis Line: (866) 325-0339

Substance Abuse Hotline: (800) 662-4357

Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-7233

Adams-Hanover Crisis Information Referral Hotline:
(717) 632-4900

Advent Sermons

(Sunday morning and on Facebook)

12/13/2020	Matthew 1:18-25	Joseph: Doing the Right Thing
12/20/2020	Luke 1:26-38	Mary: Radical Obedience
12/27/2020	Luke 2:22-40	Simeon and Anna: Fulfillment

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