



Valley Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Dear Friend in Christ,

Today marks the first week of a new church year, and the church season of Advent. Advent is a season of repentance and preparation as we heed the call of John the Baptist to make way for the Christ to who is to come. In that spirit, I am happy to share with you the first installment of our Advent sermon series on the birth of John the Baptist to his parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, verses 5-25. In this passage, Gabriel appears to tell Zechariah of John's birth, and Zechariah can't quite believe it...

Please use following phone numbers and links between 10:15am and 10:30am. You can join in one of two ways:

By computer, smart phone or tablet:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86757133623?pwd=OTFUQWJvU21MMmR6bkY5SitpelR1UT09>

By Phone: 1 (312) 626 6799 ID 867 5713 3623, Passcode 205879

(If you need a live link to the Worship link, you can go to the homepage of our website at www.vccbhm.org with the passcode 205879 OR click on "Links to Zoom" then the Sunday Worship link.)

I look forward to seeing you on Sunday.

Christ's and yours,
Pastor Eric

Valley Christian Church

First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2020

PRELUDE

*"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel/
Of the Father's Love Begotten"*

*Margaret Cox
Pianist*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.

People: Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.

Leader: The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth.

People: And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

(Luke 3:4-6, NRSV)

HYMN OF PRAISE

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

*O come, O come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here until the son of God appear
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel*

*O come thou dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's deep shadows put to flight
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel*

*O come thou wisdom from on high
And order all things far and nigh
To us the path of knowledge show
And cause us in her ways to go
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel*

*O come desire of nations, bind all peoples
In one heart and mind
Bid envy strife and quarrels cease
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel*

INVOCATION

*Judy Sellers
Worship Leader*

SHARING JOYS AND CONCERNS

PASTORAL PRAYER

Long-anticipated God, today we begin our work to prepare for your son's arrival. We pray to you for the strength to do that work well, and the wisdom to do that work faithfully. As we do this work, we pray to you on behalf of the people whom we have named aloud here today, and of all your children everywhere, as we pray for them both silently and aloud by name at this time...

Rev. Dr. Eric Atcheson

SPECIAL MUSIC

*Duet by Bill and Mary Ellen Caughran
"Ding Dong! Merrily on High/ He is Born" A Christmas
Duet on Traditional French Carols.*

*Arranged by Anna
Laura Page*

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:5-25

*Judy Sellers
Worship Leader*

MEDITATION

"Zechariah Rebuked"
See second insert for Meditation

Rev. Dr. Eric Atcheson

HYMN

"Come, O Long Expected Jesus"

*Come, O long expected Jesus, born to set your people free
From our fears and sins release us
Christ in whom our rest shall be
You, our strength and consolation, come salvation to impart
Dear desire of many a nation, joy of many a longing heart*

*Born your people to deliver, born a child and yet a king
Born to reign in us forever
Born your gracious realm to bring
By your own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone
By your all-sufficient merit raise us to your glorious throne*

SHARING OUR OFFERING WITH GOD

Share your financial offering with the church by mail or bring it by the church office. Thank you for your love gifts.

*Judy Sellers
Worship Leader*

**OFFERTORY
PRAYER**

*Judy Sellers
Worship Leader*

**CALL TO
COMMUNION**

May we remember that preparation was not limited to Christ's birth, but that He had to prepare for His death too.

Rev. Dr. Eric Atcheson

**COMMUNION
HYMN**

"Emmanuel"

*Emmanuel, Emmanuel
His name is called Emmanuel
God with us, revealed in us
His name is called Emmanuel*

*Emmanuel, Emmanuel
His name is called Emmanuel
God with us, revealed in us
His name is called Emmanuel*

**COMMUNION
PRAYER**

Conclude by praying together the Lord's Prayer

*Eve Harman
Elder*

**HOLY
COMMUNION**

Partake of the holy communion (bread, juice, or whatever is available to you)

**WORDS OF
INSTITUTION**

Hear the words of Jesus when He said, "Take and eat, this is my body, broken for you. Take and drink, this is the cup of the covenant poured out for you."

BENEDICTION

May the God who has told you of the coming arrival of Jesus Christ send you forth to love and serve in the name of that baby boy who is to come, and may the blessing of that same Lord be with you on this day and on all days. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Eric Atcheson

POSTLUDE

*Margaret Cox
Pianist*

You are warmly invited to remain in our Zoom worship space for some online fellowship time following the postlude.



Hope

MEDITATION
Sunday, November 22, 2020
“Zechariah Rebuked,” Luke 1:5-25

“The Other Holy Couple: An Advent with Elizabeth and Zechariah,”
Week One

Until very recently, when I began teaching Disciples of Christ history and polity, I did not know the name Samuel Lowery. But I should have. You should.

Samuel Lowery was a Black-Indigenous Disciple of Christ in the 1800s, born to a freed Black father and a Cherokee mother. His mother Ruth died when he was a child, and his father Peter raised him in the Disciples of Christ in Tennessee, where both of them preached until the end of 1856, when anti-Black riots led them to move to Ohio and then to Canada.

When Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Lowery became an army chaplain, ministering first to Black infantry and then Black artillery units for the rest of the Civil War. After the war, he returned to Tennessee and then, in 1875, he moved to Alabama, to Huntsville. He was admitted to the bar as a lawyer and became editor of the *National Freeman* periodical.

Then, in 1880, he became the first Black lawyer to try a case before the Supreme Court of the United States after the first female lawyer to try a case before the Supreme Court recommended his membership to the Supreme Court bar.

All by the time he turned fifty years old.

How can this be, Zechariah asks Gabriel.

How can it be that Zechariah and Elizabeth will have a child, as old as they are?

How can this be, that the child they will have will be so remarkable that Gospel chapters will be written about him, untold children will be named after him, and

(over)

we will know his name today?

And, how can this be that this child’s spiritual heirs, who, like the Baptist were trailbreakers who turned the disobedient to righteous ways of thinking and made ready a people for the Lord, how can this be that we do not know all their names today?

Because our own sins and shortcomings keep us from seeing what God sees—what God has always seen. What we might have a chance at seeing, if we hear the words of the Baptist when he grows up and preaches on how he has been sent to make way for the Lord, and to make His paths straight.

How can this be, Zechariah asks Gabriel, and Gabriel rebukes him. For the answer was always there. It is up to us to find it.

At top as we read this passage, it is vital for us to understand that Zechariah is not unfaithful—as Luke conveys, he serves as a priest in his community, and Zechariah’s “how can this be” response to Gabriel’s appearance and words ought to strike us as a very human moment. Zechariah is faithful, but only God is all-knowing. The issue at hand is not that Zechariah is bad, or unfaithful, or anything of the sort. It is that he is human, and unable to see everything God can do or be.

So it may strike us as harsh of Gabriel to silence Zechariah for the months to follow until John’s birth, but Gabriel makes clear why he should have been believed from the start: “I stand in God’s presence, and I was sent to bring this good news to you.”

How often have we doubted the word of people who have confounded our expectations for the better, who have given us good news when we were expecting tragedy, who were sent to lift us up instead of to tear us down? If we allow ourselves to doubt what is good—and even if that doubt is entirely and completely understandable—perhaps that doubt needs a bit of correction and rebuke.