

Immanuel United Church  
Fourth Advent | Seeking the Spirit | Blossom of Love  
Dec 19th, 2021

Welcome

Announcements

In the midst of uncertainty, Jesus assures his disciples:  
Just as the tree blooms, so the signs are clear that the kingdom of God is near.  
In the deep of our own winter, we look for them:  
bud of hope, branch of peace, sprig of joy, blossom of love.

Choral Introit: VU 27 *Tomorrow Christ Is Coming*

Call to Worship:

Rise, take heart, and love deeply.

**The glow of God the Divine Lover lightens our hearts.**

Lighting the fourth Advent Candle

Candlelighter:

God's love comes to ground, and like an arc, large to hold, embrace, heal, and restore.

All:

**God-who-never-ceases-to-love, kindle our hearts that we may burn anew with your love. Bless us with the flame of lively living and believing. Take our words and release them to speak of you; take our minds and broaden them to reflect your overflowing love; take our hearts and set them alight with your desire for goodness. In the name of the One full of love. Amen.**

*(Light the fourth Advent Candle — Blossom of Love)*

Hymn: VU 34 O-so-so (Come Now, O God of Peace)

(Singing with action)

**O-so-so o-so-so, pyong-hwa-ui-im-gum,**

**u-ri-ga han-mom i-ru-ge ha-so-so.**

(Singing together)

**Come now, O God of love, we are your people;  
pour out your spirit that we be one body.**

Scripture: Luke 1:39-55

Within a few days Mary set out and hurried to the hill country to a town of Judah, where she entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.

As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of the Messiah should come to me? The moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who believed that what our God said to her would be accomplished!

Mary said:

"My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you, my Saviour.

For you have looked with favour upon your lowly servant, and from this day forward all generations will call me blessed.

For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me, and holy is your Name.

Your mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear you. You have shown strength with your arm; you have scattered the proud in their conceit; you have deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places. You have filled the hungry with good things, while you have sent the rich away empty.

You have come to the aid of Israel your servant, mindful of your mercy — the promise you made to our ancestors — to Sarah and Abraham and their descendants forever."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home.

The Choir Anthem: *Goin' to Bethlehem* (Solo, Jim Jost)

Reflection: Love Incarnate, Good News to all

On December 1 had a memorable opportunity to be a panelist on the *Wednesday Wisdom* Inter-Faith Speakers series at the University of Manitoba. At that panel I was seated (virtually) next to Cary Miller, an associate professor in the Department of Native Studies at the University. Her stories and reflections very much demonstrated her scholarship on Indigenous history and studies. The first question we were asked by the moderator was “How do the teachings, wisdom, of your particular spiritual tradition/ worldview shape your conception and understanding of race?” Miller’s response was that what “race” means to her people and her own understanding is that we are *relational*. Then, beautifully, she invited us to imagine with her what might possibly be going on *at that very moment* in her backyard which was covered with snow. She had saved and left plenty of food, plants and grains, that could be used by the animals, like deer, which visited her backyard for survival in winter. She said, “Deer have shared their place with me; I feel I should do the same for them.” Well, of course, she articulated it much more eloquently, but that’s how I would sum it up. Because we are created to be relational, the race is not just we humans. Race as a concept to her people, the Anishinabee, is profoundly relational; not only humans but all are relatives, perceiving everyone and every creature fundamentally as family, if they are not in the times of war.

Miller’s opening led me to remember how I treat the deer family whenever they visit my own backyard, in summer, in fall and in winter. They visit for food. They look for nutrients. For themselves, for their young ones. Of course, I loved them until I realized that deer in the forest at the back of where my new home is located, are not just eye-candy, that they could visit the backyard at dawn or midnight when no human is around, and they love to eat, and have feasted —on my hollyhocks, hibiscus, cosmos, and Min-Goo’s lettuce. Very often my family wanted to take photos of them strolling in the forest, eating grass, while we watched them while having our own breakfast at our kitchen table! But no more after our plants’ strong, thick stems were half eaten.

Miller’s opening made me laugh at me — whose mind was still at war with deer as I jokingly called them my plant’s natural enemy. It humbled me, and made me rethink my relationship with deer, and also, with all creation, which shares with me and we humans, settlers, their earth, land and space. I decided to no longer even make a joke about how I do not enjoy the deer’s visit. I also find, especially these winter days, that squirrels become very frequent visitors at our deck. What puzzles me is, I do not see anything useful to me or to the squirrel on the entire, small deck! However, one mild morning last week a squirrel came and checked in every five to ten minutes, then went where the perennial Korean chives I planted stood, dried brown, in the snow-covered planter. After the flowers were gone, the black seeds, ripened through the fall, are inside the heads. The squirrel reached its two little front legs out to the end of the dried chive

stem, which was twice as tall as it is, and began to harvest the seeds and take them into its mouth. I smiled. My little deck had something to offer to this relative!

The reason why I share these stories with you on this Fourth Advent morning as we seek the spirit of the Blossom of Love, is that for me, such moments invite us to think about the meaning of **Incarnation**. You might have heard me refer to Jesus, during worship or in a message, as **Love Incarnate**. For example, at the memorial service for Bill Burr this past Wednesday, I said that we hold our hope to Love Incarnate, the Risen Christ. I used Love Incarnate, even though, originally, the prayer I used from the worship resource has Risen Christ only in its verse. I wanted to remember, as we gathered, that we celebrated the life of Bill in this time of Advent. English dictionaries I find on-line explain *Incarnate* to mean “invested with flesh or bodily nature and form, especially with human nature and form.” (Source) “(Especially of a deity or spirit) embodied in flesh; in human form. i.e. God Incarnate” (Source) “Incarnate means having a bodily form. If you encounter someone who pulls off butterflies’ wings for fun, you might describe the person as “evil incarnate.”” (Source) Evil, shown in form, in behaviour, *spilled*.

In contrast, Jesus, Love Incarnate, lets us know how God’s Love is shown in form, in behaviour, *poured out*. In *Incarnate*, the prefix *in-* means ‘in’ and *caro* means ‘flesh’, so incarnate means ‘in the flesh’. The perspective I wish to share with you, and which I have learned from Cary Miller’s understanding of race as being relational, is that Advent calls us to open our eyes and ears and heart to see, witness, and enjoy the ***Love Incarnate in all forms, not just human form***. It is shown, in beautiful balance, in every form, in every body, that contains harmony, ***in all beings and all things in the family of life-giving, love-sharing, self-emptying ecology of God***.

Where, and in which moment, have you waited for (and would like) to welcome Love Incarnate, the blossom of love in this Advent season?

Can you think about a particular image or physical form or action or word that shows you how God, the Wholly Love, the presence in all things, in all beings, *becomes flesh* and loves us?

(Silence)

Beloveds, let us praise the glory of God, Love Incarnate, in all things.

The Good News to all, all relations.

Hymn: VU 12 *She Walked In the Summer (The Visit)*

Offering

Mary sings ancient trust—the song of generations— that God comes to fill the hungry and lift the humble. She sings that love and truth will meet, that justice and peace will kiss.

Hymn: VU 55 *In the Bleak Midwinter* (V 4)

**What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
if I were a wise man, I would do my part,  
yet what I can I give him — give my heart.**

Prayer: (An Advent Prayer, VU 13, paraphrased)

**O God, our deliverer:**

**you cast down the mighty, and lift up those of no account;**

**like Elizabeth and Mary, who embraced one another with songs of  
liberation,**

**may we, pregnant with your Spirit, affirm one another in hope for the  
world,**

**with the gifts we share today, in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

Prayers of the People (Nancy Sanders)

Hymn: VU 17 *O Ancient Love*

*O ancient love, processing through the ages; O hidden love, revealed in human  
form; O promised love, the dream of seers and sages; O living Love,  
within our hearts be born, O liveing Love, within our hearts be borne.*

*O homeless love, that dwells among the stranger, O lowly love, that knows the  
mighty's scorn; O hungry love, that lay with in a manger: O living Love,  
within our hearts be born, O living Love, within our hearts be borne.*

*O gentle love, caressing those in sorrow; O tender love, that comforts those  
forlorn; O hopeful love, that promises tomorrow: O living Love, within  
our hearts be born, O living Love, within our hearts be borne.*

*O suffering love, that bears our human weakness; O boundless love, that rises  
with the morn; O mighty love, concealed in infant meakness: O living  
Love, within our hearts be born, O living Love, within our hearts be  
borne.*

Choral Extroit: *Peace, Peace* (words and music by Rick and Sylvia Powell)

**Peace, peace, peace on earth and good will to all.**

**This is a time for joy, this is a time for love.**

**Now let us all sing together of peace, peace, peace on earth.**