



Valley Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Dear Friend in Christ,

Today marks the fourth and final Sunday of Advent, the first season of the new church year. Advent is a season of repentance and preparation as we heed the call of John the Baptist to make way for the Christ who is to come. In that spirit, I am happy to share with you the final installment of our Advent sermon series on the birth of John the Baptist to his parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah. This final message will focus on Zechariah's song of praise in Luke 1:67-80, which mirrors Mary's famous Magnificat in some very profound ways. I look forward to hearing both their extraordinary singing voices with you on Sunday!

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 "Zoom Links" then the Sunday Worship link.)

I look forward to seeing you on Sunday.

Christ's and yours, Pastor Eric

Valley Christian Church

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2020

PRELUDE

"The First Noel"

*Margaret Cox
Pianist*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

People: For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Leader: The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

People: His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation, and he has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.

(Luke 1:47-49, 54, NRSV)

*Clarence Sellers
Worship Leader*

HYMN OF PRAISE

"O Come, All Ye Faithful"

*O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem
Come and behold him, born the king of angels
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord*

*Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing all ye citizens of heaven above
Glory to God, glory in the highest
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him
O come let us adore him Christ the Lord*

*Yea, Lord we greet thee, born for our salvation
Jesus, to thee be all glory given
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord*

INVOCATION

SHARING JOYS AND CONCERNS

*Clarence Sellers
Worship Leader*

PASTORAL PRAYER

Fast-arriving God, as we are mere days from Bethlehem and the birth of your Son, we pause on the journey there to worship you and pray to you—for strength for this last leg of the journey, for strength to see through the rest of 2020, and for joy at Christ's birth and all that it promises us. We pray to you on behalf of the people we have named aloud and the people and communities who are in the silence of our souls, as we lift up to you the ones who we have named aloud at this time...

Rev. Dr. Eric Atcheson

SPECIAL MUSIC

Valley Bell ensemble,
Andrea Clark, Bill and Mary Ellen Caughran
"Silent Night"

Music by
Franz Gruber

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:67-80

*Clarence Sellers
Worship Leader*

MESSAGE

"Zechariah Redeemed"
See insert for message excerpt

Rev. Dr. Eric Atcheson

HYMN

"Hark, the Herald Angels Sing"

*Hark, the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God & sinners
reconciled*

*Joyful all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies
With angelic host proclaim, Christ is born in Bethlehem
Hark, the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King*

*Christ by highest heaven adored
Christ the everlasting lord
Late in life behold him come
Offspring of the virgin's womb
Veiled in flesh the godhead see, hail the incarnate deity
Pleased in flesh with us to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel
Hark, the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King*

SHARING OUR OFFERING WITH GOD OFFERTORY PRAYER

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

*Clarence Sellers
Worship Leader*

*Clarence Sellers
Worship Leader*

**CALL TO
COMMUNION**

May we remember that the gift of God becoming flesh did not end on Christmas, but continued through Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and the Ascension.

Rev. Dr. Eric Atcheson

**COMMUNION
HYMN**

"What Child is This"

*What child is this who laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping
This, this is Christ the King
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe the son of
Mary*

*Why lies he in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding
Good Christian fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading
This, this is Christ the King
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe the son of
Mary*

**COMMUNION
PRAYER**

Conclude by praying together the Lord's Prayer

*Sarah Draper
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 sees you and calls you by name call you forth once more from worship into ministry and from prayer into preparation for Christ's arrival. May the blessing of that same God be with you on this day and on all days. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Eric Atcheson

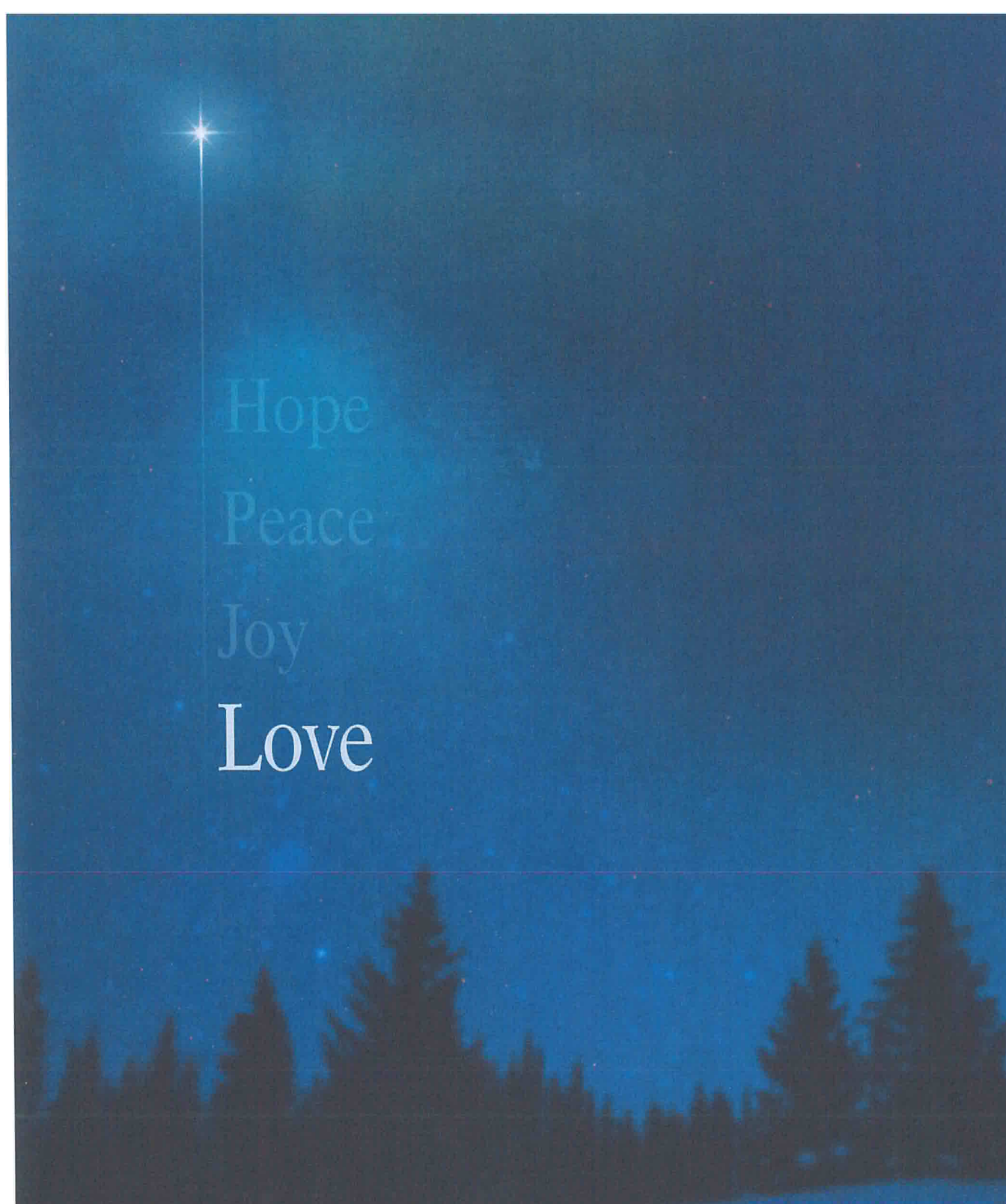
POSTLUDE

"Carol of the Bells"

*Margaret Cox
Pianist*

You are warmly invited to remain in our Zoom worship space for some online

fellowship time following the postlude.
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MEDITATION
Sunday, December 20, 2020
“Zechariah Redeemed,” Luke 1:67-80

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

Last week, I began my message to you by sharing in brief the story of my daughter’s namesake, my great-grandmother Satenig, who along with her brother Harry Toumajan successfully escaped a genocide that killed 1.5 million Armenian men, women, and children after their mother, my great-grandmother Altoon, died in 1916.

I knew part of Satenig’s story from childhood; my family handed it down to me. But some facts I had misremembered, and I was unaware of others. Meanwhile, I had no inkling as to her brother Harry’s trials until I learned from my cousin Hagop that Harry had put his ordeal to paper in a memoir, a copy of which I managed to find online and have shipped to me back when we lived in Vancouver.

Harry and Satenig had fled to the United States separately—she by way of the Pacific Ocean, from Vladivostok to Yokohama to Seattle, and he by way of Russia to Oslo to New York. I knew nothing of this latter exodus by my great-great-uncle, and he took pains in his writing to express his gratitude for the people who had successfully sheltered him and smuggled him away. He writes, in part:

I (want to) express my sincere appreciation for such a man as Mehmed Aga, and for many others of the (Muslim) faith, because I am convinced that, were it not for them, I would not be alive today...I am just as strongly convinced, and know it to be true, that many others of my race under the same circumstances as mine would also not be alive today were it not for the fact that some sympathetic, understanding Turk with a golden heart at some time or another, perhaps for a few moments, a few hours, or a few days, extended a warm, friendly hand, giving food, shelter, and comfort to an otherwise doomed person.

Redemption is a powerful thing—we all love a good redemption story, of an antagonist turning themselves into a hero. But what if redemption is simply our becoming our best selves? That while some among us are capable of truly profound evil, maybe the rest of us are not cartoon villains to begin with, and so for us to be redeemed means becoming the very best versions of ourselves? That even when others show their worst selves, otherwise ordinary folk can still show their best selves. This is what I see in Zechariah—always a faithful and devoted man, impossible to fit with a black hat, but now, finally, after the birth of his son, he is his very best self.

This is a sermon series for the church season of Advent, or, in much of popular American culture, the “Christmas season.” But the Christmas season does not traditionally begin until Christmas Day. The four weeks leading up to Christmas are set aside in the church calendar to be a time of preparing the way for the Lord, and in that spirit, the origin story of John the Baptist, who preached that message of preparing the way for the Lord, seems an appropriate sermon series for now. So, for this Advent, we will be walking alongside the other Holy Couple of Luke’s Gospel—not Mary and Joseph (though we will of course be at their side on Christmas Eve), but Mary’s relative Elizabeth, and Elizabeth’s husband Zechariah. They end up overshadowed by Mary and Joseph’s dramatic saga in the end, but there is much in Luke’s telling of their story to capture and hold our attention as well.

We have spent three weeks now hearing the saga of Elizabeth and Zechariah in the birth of their son John, and that saga culminates in Zechariah’s prophetic song, which concludes Luke 1. It also has a vivid parallel in Luke 1—the Magnificat of Mary. And the resemblance is hardly coincidental!

(over)