

## Sunday, December 21, 2025 - Advent 4: LOVE

Christmas Carolling Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus VU 2  
There's a Voice in the Wilderness Calling VU 18, vs 1, 3, 4.

### Advent Poem -by L. Schneider

Expectant, restless Mary  
Awaiting her new child  
Calmly watching, now does tarry  
In a Manger lowly,  
Soon made Holy  
Yet she rests, so mild.

### Welcome and Announcements

#### Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy

*Candles from previous week are lit.*

#### We gather

One: Love abundant overflows, pouring into our midst: (a)Rise, take heart, and love deeply.

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

One: We are together and never alone. Gathered on this fourth Sunday in Advent we witness to God's deep love and tender compassion for the whole world. Our witness is love.

#### We listen

*Invite someone to testify/tell their experience of deep tenderness and, compassion and what such overflowing meant for them and others. After their brief testimony invite all to respond:*

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

*The remaining candle is lit.*

#### We pray

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

#### Advent Hymn A Candle is Burning, VU # 6

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.	A candle is burning, a candle of peace; A candle to signal that conflict must cease: For Jesus is coming to show us the way; A message of peace humbly laid in the hay.	A candle is burning, a candle of joy, A candle to welcome brave Mary's new boy. Our hearts fill with wonder, and eyes light and glow As joy brightens winter like sunshine on snow.	A candle is burning, a candle of love, A candle to point us to heaven above. A baby for Christmas; a wonderful birth, For Jesus is bringing God's love to our earth.	We honour Messiah with Christ candle's flame; Our Christmas Ee candles glad tiding proclaim. O come, all you faithful, rejoice in this night; As God comes among us, the Christian's delight.
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#### Ministry of Music How Far is it to Bethlehem?

**Children's Ministry** When you go to sleep tonight, where will you sleep? You sleep in a bed. The Bible tells us that, after Jesus was born, Mary wrapped him in cloths and lay him down to sleep. But remember how there was no room for Mary and Joseph in the inn? There wasn't a bed or a crib to lay him in! The baby Jesus was tucked in to a manger. A manger is a wooden box used to hold food for animals to eat. It probably wasn't very soft or even very clean. Maybe Mary filled it with hay to make it softer for the tiny, new baby. This is a very surprising way for a great king to be born. And it is very strange that when God chose to send his own Son into the world he had him enter a stable and sleep in an animal's food box. The humble way that Jesus was born was the same way that he would live his whole life. Jesus came as a king, but as a king who serves his people. The world had never seen a king like this.

*Dear Jesus, it is amazing to us that when you came from God into our world, you were born into a stable and slept in a manger instead of a king's bed. We thank you for coming as our servant king. Amen.*

#### The Lord's Prayer(sung)

**Prayer of Illumination** There's a light in the east, shining for us, as star of hope shining in all of its brilliance for the whole world. Despite the cloudy days and nights of our existence, the star radiates its warmth and light, awaiting open eyes, hearts, and minds to welcome its truth, its promise, and its permanence. As we have travelled together this blessed pathway which is Advent, our role, our purpose, and yes, our challenge is to attune and prepare ourselves to welcome the light of the world into our lives, so that it might transform and illuminate us from without and from within, joining Jesus on his Holy journey into the pages of history, of the Bible, and of our lives as a church and as individual believers. Amen.

**Hymn**     **O Come, O Come, Emmanuel**, VU # 1 -updated lyrics by The Very Rev. Richard Bott

O come, O come, Emmanuel, Into this world of brokenness to dwell, With hope, with peace, with joy, with love, Save us from all that we fall short of. Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come To thee, God's people.	O come, Dayspring come And cheer all people to your advent, Here, in front of all our plagues so stand, That we might reach out offering our hand, Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come To thee, God's people.	O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, Free Creation from adversity, From evil's pow'r thy people save, And give us vict'ry o'er the grave Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come To thee, God's people.	Where racism, greed, or hatred are our blight Shine on a justice, healing light, That equity in place would grow, As on Your Way of Love we go. Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come To thee, God's people.	O come, our God with all of your might, Our fears and chaos put to flight, That, through your grace's healing pow'r, The world's true self be brought to flow'r. Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come To thee, God's people.
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**Scripture Readings**

**Isaiah 7: 10-16**

*Note* Ahaz was the son of Jotham, who was son of King Uzziah. Specifically, Isaiah 7 is set during the time when the kings of Israel and Syria join forces to try to remove Ahaz from the throne of Judah. Israel was the name for the nation comprised of the northern ten tribes of Israel.

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test."

Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

**Matthew 1: 18-25**

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, <sup>18</sup>because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

**Hymn**     **Hark, the Glad Sound**, VU # 29

Hark, the glad sound: the Saviour comes, The Saviour promised long: Let every heart prepare a throne, And every voice a song.	He comes, the prisoners to release In Satan's bondage held, The gates of brass before him burst, The iron fetters yield.	He comes, the broken heart to bind, The bleeding soul to cure, And with the treasures of this grace To bless the humble poor	Our glad hosannas, Price of Peace, Your welcome shall proclaim; And heaven's eternal arches ring With your beloved name.
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**Message**   **A Promise of Love**

*Hurry kills Presence.  
Worry kills Peace.  
Doubt kills Faith.  
Ego kills Love.*

God is love. Jesus brings God's love to mankind. The spirit burns within each of us and enables us to shine through our lives, as we vivify or bring to physical reality God's Love, already embodied, or incarnated, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. In a perfect, harmonious, and peaceful reality, love would be the inciting force behind all thought, speech, and action. Unfortunately, it does not always manage to do so, even though it is all-powerful. The problem is not in the design, but in the nature of those called to live love out each and every day. The problem is with this group of creatures called human beings.

Being present means living in the here and now, being fully attuned to and aware of your surroundings, which is your/our context, and of everyone nearby, or of whom we are aware. When we are truly present, we can smell the gentle aroma of a baking Christmas cookie, hear the murmuring of a baby or a kitten when it is sleeping, taste the hint of cinnamon in a breakfast roll, feel the gentle coarseness of the skin of an orange, or the rough bark of an oak tree's bark. We can feel the presence of a loved one's touch, embrace, or their presence, too. Time slows down, our minds and hearts relax, we breathe in more slowly and deeply, ready to be inspired by the awesome wonders of God's good creation. When we are fully present we are ready to speak to our God, to hear God's messages in our ears, and to contemplate the abundant blessings with which we have been blessed. Hurry kills presence, but presence kills hurry, urgency, haste, carelessness, and our inability to appreciate all beings whom we are fortunate enough to encounter.

Stressful, energy-consuming worry, if we let it, can consume our waking moments, and those moments when we need to be restfully sleeping, refreshing our bodies and our minds. We worry endlessly about so many things, which are in reality of little consequence: tomorrow's meeting, seeing Aunt Bertha over the holidays, how to pay our rent or food bills, or how our good friend is doing. Once we allow worry to exhaust and consume our peace, we are less able to be present to our friends and family, and to have the energy and mental focus to actually do something about these things – read or prepare the agenda for that meeting, call up Aunt Bertha and tell her how eager you are to see her, make a budget and pay down debt gradually, and visit or call your friend tomorrow, as doing so will comfort you both. God is always available to hear our prayers and our lament. Take your worries by the horns and cast them aside, as Jesus did with the money changers in the Temple!

It seems to be human nature to doubt all things, and in this crazy, hectic world where fake news has become the norm and artificial intelligence blurs the line between reality and illusion, we must hold onto those people and truths which we can trust, things that are permanent and rock solid, not shiny, and temporary. Doubting helps us to assess the value and truth of things to the best of our ability, but we belong to a long-lasting body of word, music, art, and ministry which proclaim the truth of the Christian story. So many have taken this entity of endless, immeasurable worth, and distorted it for their own gain. This has led to so much confusion, which in turn leads to doubting those things once considered to be sacrosanct. As we wait for the coming of Jesus through Advent, we are invited to revel in the holiness of his coming and of his birth, to wonder in awe at His glory, to hold up our doubts into the light of day and faith, and to cast them out, like the demons which they are. Faith is belief, faith is surety, the firm understanding and commitment to something much larger than ourselves. We can indeed catch glimpses of eternity by looking up at the stars, by looking at the wings of an insect under an electron microscope, or by looking into another believer's eyes. Faith tells us that we are indeed safe and secure in our Saviour's arms.

Jesus commands us to love one another, and yet, confoundingly, every human has an extraordinarily strong awareness of self, often a high regard for our self, with its inherent need to be superior to other people, and perhaps even superior to God in some ways. This is our ego, our sense of self-esteem or self-importance. God has given us egos so that we may become strong, self-assured individuals who are confident problem solvers and thinkers, with the free will to listen, to understand, to learn, and one hopes, to work toward attaining wisdom, self-respect, the respect and love for others. We require a strong ego in order to become self-sufficient and self-reliant, but Jesus commands us to not overdo it, remaining conscious and respectful of the multiple egos surrounding us – to love our brothers and sisters as ourselves. Equally, compassionately, and unconditionally. Too much ego leads the way to narcissism, self-idolization and the unfair treatment and attitude toward others, the facet of humanity which leads to greed as one's sense of what one deserves escalates! Rather we are asked to respectfully share, to love, to understand, to empathize, and to consider others as much as we do ourselves.

Jesus is coming to turn the ways of the world on their head:

<i>Hurry kills Presence.</i>	<i>Presence eliminates hurry.</i>
<i>Worry kills Peace.</i>	<i>Peace renders worry unnecessary.</i>
<i>Doubt kills Faith.</i>	<i>Faith eliminates doubt</i>
<i>Ego kills Love.</i>	<i>Love balances our egos to the golden mean.</i>

The love of the universe is going to be fully revealed to us once again this Christmas. Our time of waiting, however impatiently, is now almost at an end. Jesus will come into this world to inspire us to, with great hope and joy, welcome a birth and rebirth of present, earnest, and universal love. Amen!

**Hymn** **Once, in Royal David's City**, VU # 62

Once in royal David's city Stood a lowly cattle shed, Where a mother laid her baby In a manger for his bed. Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ, her little child.	He came down to earth from heaven Who, with God, is over all, And his shelter was a stable, and his cradle was a stall. There among the poor and lowly Lived on earth our Saviour holy.	For he is our lifelong pattern; Daily, when on earth he grew, He was tempted, scorned, rejected, Tears and smiles like us he knew. Thus he feels for all our sadness, And he shares in all our gladness.	And our eyes at last shall see him, Through his own redeeming love; For that child who seemed to helpless Is our Lord in heaven above; And he leads his children on To the place where he is gone.
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**A Christmas Prayer of Confession** VU # 63

God of stable, stars, and surprises,  
Of light and hope and new life:  
Open our eyes and hearts to your presence in our world;  
Forgive our obsession with property and possessions;  
Forgive our compromises and narrowness of vision.

Open us to your grace,  
That we might hear again the song of the angels,  
And respond with a song in our hearts,  
And in our lives.  
Amen

**Offering Invitation & Prayer** In God's "Kin"dom there is joy. Great joy! It comes from taking care of others and being taken care of ourselves. Your gifts to this church do that locally, while your gifts to the Mission and Service of the United Church of Canada do it across Canada and globally. It feels so good to be generous!

O God, may gifts given here today, and those we have given by PAR, help to create joy: joy across the world, joy within our homes, and joy within ourselves. Amen.

**Prayers of the People** *adapted from Richard J. Fairchild*

Loving God - as we approach the day of Christ's birth help us to throw wide the doors of our hearts in preparation. Help us to sense the importance of what happened so long ago when the angel Gabriel visited Mary, to remember the words of the angels and the prophets and the teachers of old, and to celebrate all the promises that you made through them. Help us to take firm hold of the meaning of all these things and to know in the depths of our being that even now you are seeking to work in us and through us to fulfill the promises you have made to always love and support us, as we commit to doing your bidding in our world.

Lord - may this Christmas season be for us and for those around us a season of healing, may it be a season of hope and of love and of joy, may it be a time of true sharing and of rejoicing in all the earth. We pray O God for those in need around us: for those who need a second birth, for those who need a tender touch and a healing word.

We pray too, O God, for the children of our world - and all those of tender faith, all those who have no home to call their home, all those who are hungry and thirsty. Bless, we pray, the innocent of the earth and all those who trust in you. Bless the humble and the powerless and bring down from their thrones those who full of pride and those who are indifferent. Lord, hear our prayer.

Bless, we pray, too, each special one we name before you now for healing and peace for all of our members now residing in care homes, those recovering or suffering from illnesses and surgeries, those who hunger in so very many different ways in our midst. May the offerings which we have shared through The Grace Café, the Daffodil Society, and in our Mission and Services givings, serve to nourish and uphold all who are in need.

We ask these things O God, with hope and praise in our hearts, our minds, and our souls, through Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen

**Advent Sung Benediction** **God of Still Waiting**, MVU # 20, verse 4

Word true and faithful,  
Hope bringing Spirit,  
God of enfolding love;  
Come in your fullness and grace;  
Work through our lives for your praise.

**A Loving Benediction**

Be people of love. Let love live in your heart and share the love of Christ with all you meet. Share love by loving those you see regularly. Start by loving your community. Share love by loving those you do not know. How do your actions affect the rest of God's creation? Share love by praying for our world. In this Advent season, we need to see, feel, and share love. As you go out into the wonder of God's creations, share love, joy, peace, and hope with those you meet.

**Choral Amen**