

WELCOME (after bell rings, before first hymn)

Welcome to worship this morning. Today is the 4th Sunday in Advent. On this 4th Sunday in Advent we have our Choir and Band Concert as our worship service. We will follow the order of worship printed in your service folder. The hymn numbers for the congregational hymns are listed in the folder if you chose to use your hymnal. The hymns are also printed in the service folder. There are two exceptions to this: Our Psalm of the day is Psalm 14 in *Christian Worship Supplement*, the small book you will find in the pew racks (hold up a copy of the *Supplement*). Also, the hymn we will sing before and after the confession of sins and absolution is hymn 739, Baptismal Waters Cover Me, which you will also find in *Christian Worship Supplement*. The psalm of the day and this hymn are not printed in your service folder. You will need to use the supplement.

As we gather together on this 4th Sunday in Advent to Worship, God's Word in readings and in songs points us to God's answer to a very important question: What is the best way to prepare for Jesus' coming? It's not with frantic doing. It's not with a focus on what we have done or promise to do. It's not with how we will pay back what he comes to bring. The best preparation for Christmas is a readiness to ***Receive the Royal Gift*** that only God's grace can give to us.

I invite you now to join together in singing our opening hymn, Hymn 1, *The Advent of our King*.

A GIFT THAT IS NEEDED

Introduction

Have you ever noticed the displays that pop up in department stores at this time of the year, and only at this time of the year. They are full of “gift” ideas that no one would ever buy for themselves. Most of these items are things you do not really need. That is why they are not on the shelves year round.

A gift that is truly needed quickly becomes a gift that is truly and deeply appreciated. Each week we begin our Sunday morning worship with a reminder of how much we desperately need God’ Royal Gift of Grace. We confess our sins. We throw ourselves at God’s feet and admit that we are worthless and have nothing to offer him to turn away his wrath. And then we hear the Words of his forgiveness wash over us like a healing flood. What a gift! I am forgiven.

This morning we will sing our Psalm of the Day, Psalm 14 on page 40 of Christian Worship Supplement. In this psalm we are reminded that all are corrupt. We have nothing to offer God. We can only cry out and implore his mercy to send salvation to us.

After the Psalm of the Day we will continue with the prayer of the day that is printed in the service folder. Then a soloist will sing verse 1 of hymn 739 in the Supplement. The congregation will then sing verses 1-3, followed by confession and absolution, and then we will sing verses 4-5 of hymn 739. Focus on the powerful words of this moving hymn.

A GIFT THAT WAS PROMISED

Introduction

Throughout the Old Testament, from immediately after Adam and Eve sinned until the last words of the Prophet Malachi, God promised a Savior who would do what we could not. He would take away our sins and reunite us to our loving God. This promise was repeated over and over because sometimes we do not listen so well. This promise was repeated with many different pictures as well: Prophet, Shepherd, Counselor, Father. The picture that God points us to in the First lesson for the 4th Sunday in Advent is King. God would send a Savior who would rule an everlasting kingdom. The gift that our God knows we desperately need is no ordinary gift, it is a Royal Gift of Grace!

A reading from 2 Samuel 7

Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

(PAUSE)

This is the Word of the Lord.

A GIFT ANNOUNCED

Introduction

From a distance, all the gifts under a Christmas tree look a bit alike. Sure, the paper is different colors and the boxes are different sizes. But there is no way to tell which gift goes to which person unless there is a "To" and "From" tag on the gift.

The gift God had promised throughout the Old Testament would be a child that would not look any different than any other child. There would be two arms, two legs, 10 fingers, and 10 toes like the vast majority of children. But this Royal Gift of Grace was so special God wanted to make sure that there would be those who would know for a certainty who this child was. They would know that he was no ordinary child. In our Gospel for the 4th Sunday in Advent Gabriel announces this gift of grace to Mary.

A reading from Luke 1

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

(PAUSE)

This is the Gospel of our Lord.

A GIFT UNWRAPPED

Introduction

Once you have identified that gift under the tree with your name on it, what do you do? You unwrap it, of course! You may have to wait your turn but when the time comes you unwrap it eagerly. Sometimes you are surprised by what is inside, sometimes you already know. Sometimes you are excited by what you reveal, sometimes you are disappointed.

The Royal Gift of God's Grace comes to us in a place that surprises us. He is born in a stable. The next songs the choir will sing tell us of his birth. They also fill us with excitement because we know that this child is true God who has come to earth to save us and the world. There is no disappointment here!

A GIFT TO SHARE

Introduction to offering

God has sent his Royal Gift of Grace for all people. He has told his people to share this gift of grace with the entire world. One of the ways we do this here at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church is through our offerings given in response to God's gift of grace. If you wish to give, we and our Lord thank you. But please give in response to God's love for you in Jesus. Do not feel as though you are obligated to put something in the plate just because it is in front of you. Give in the joy of sins forgiven!

Introduction to Second Lesson for the 4th Sunday in Advent.

Have you ever visited friends or relatives shortly after Christmas and had this happen to you? The children pounce upon you soon after entering the house with their new gifts or toys in hand. They cannot wait to show them to you, to tell you about them, and if things go perfectly in their world, to get you to play with them and their new toys. Youthful enthusiasm is unmistakable at this time of the year!

Sometimes that enthusiasm can fade. Our last reading reminds us why our enthusiasm for sharing Jesus with the world should not fade. God desires it. He wants all nations to believe. We realize that if God had not told us this mystery we would not have ever been able to figure it out on our own. Therefore we see the urgency of telling others. They also need the Royal Gift of Grace revealed to them. We are God's voice!

A reading from Romans 16

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

(PAUSE)

This is the Word of the Lord.