

## **December 19, 2021 - Advent 4**

### **Prayer of the Day**

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that binds us, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

### **Hebrew Scriptures - Micah 5:2-3**

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.

### **Gospel - Luke 1:39-45**

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

### **Sermon**

Before birth comes pregnancy  
That time when the process has begun  
And there are clues that it's underway  
But the full arrival has yet to take place  
And while there is much to be done in preparation  
Life also becomes a waiting game

But while we prepare  
And while we wait  
We also anticipate  
We look forward  
We dream  
And we wonder how things are going to change for us

Some of the change is obvious  
Feeding at all times  
Sleepless nights  
Diapers  
Visits from friends and family

Some of the change is less clear  
How **many** sleepless nights will there be until a routine is started?  
How will I know if the crying is simply hunger or something more serious?  
Will I be able to go back to work, or will I want to?  
Can I really do this?

And it is this experience  
Of waiting while anticipating  
Of excitement mixed with anxiety  
Which has given rise to the phrase

## “Pregnant Pause”

It's that time when we collectively hold our breath  
Knowing that we have reached the Tipping Point of the story  
And that whatever direction things go  
Everything will be different  
From now on

There will be no going back

This day  
This Fourth Sunday of Advent  
Is our Pregnant Pause  
In which we take a deep breath  
Take one last look at where we were  
And get ready to plunge into what will be

The readings today are full of Pregnant Pauses

The Hebrew Prophet Micah  
Says that things will be put on hold  
“Until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth”

Salvation for the people is just around the corner  
Restoration is already on the way  
In fact, it's being born right now

But in this particular moment  
At this distinct instant of time  
There will be a brief stop  
(Which can feel like it's lasting forever!)  
And then it will arrive

That's what you call a Pregnant Pause!

And Luke's story  
Of pregnant Mary rushing to visit pregnant Elizabeth  
And stopping to listen to them sing to each other

Is a **gorgeous** Pregnant Pause

In which two women take centre stage  
In the grand story of salvation  
And celebrate what God has done  
What God is doing  
What God is going to do  
In **them**

And **through** them

It is **in** this pause  
And perhaps even because **of** this “slow down” in the story

That we can catch a glimpse  
Of what God is really doing in these two women

And maybe  
If we take advantage of this day  
Our **own** Pregnant Pause  
We too can begin to catch a glimpse  
Of what God is really doing in **us**

The temptation with Pregnant Pauses  
Is to want to skip them  
To hurry up and turn the page  
To push past the waiting and wondering  
(And, let's be honest, the worrying)  
And get to the point of finally **knowing**  
Knowing what's coming  
Knowing what the results will be  
Knowing how long it will take  
Knowing what we can do about it  
Knowing how we can avoid the worst parts  
Maybe even knowing the end of the story

Whether that be the latest Covid numbers  
And if there will be another lockdown

Or what the future of our congregation will actually be  
And what we can do to support it (or escape it)

Or even what our own, individual future will look like  
And how soon will we get there

You see the problem, right?

When we try to avoid  
Or circumvent  
The Pregnant Pauses of life  
We miss the opportunities they offer us

To stop  
To breath  
To contemplate  
To reflect  
To discern  
To wonder  
To look back  
To re-evaluate  
To anticipate  
To be present in the Now

And to be present with the One who accompanies us  
**In** the Now  
Even as we wait for the final arrival

Of the promise that's coming  
And is even now  
On the way

This day  
This Fourth Sunday of Advent  
Is a gift  
An opportunity  
A Pregnant Pause  
In which we can take a deep breath  
Take one last look at where we were  
And get ready to plunge into what will be

It is **in** this pause  
And perhaps even **because** of this “slow down” in our story  
That we can catch a glimpse  
Of what God is really doing  
In us  
And in this hurting world

So stop  
Breath  
Contemplate  
Reflect  
Discern  
Wonder

And join pregnant Mary and pregnant Elizabeth  
In singing your Pregnant Pause  
In joyful anticipation  
Of the Advent of our God

Prepare the way of the Lord

Amen

### **Prayers of the People**

As we begin again, let us offer our prayers to the God who has promised to hear us.

[*Short pause*]

A - O come, O come, Emmanuel. Show us how you are entering our realities, and kindle hope within us, that, with Elizabeth and Mary, we, too, might sing of your coming. God who comes,  
C - Fill us with hope.

A - O come, O come, Emmanuel. We admit to feeling overwhelmed: by Covid, by injustice, by incessant demands on our time, by illness, by death. Remind us that your love defines who we are, and give us faith to trust your promise, even in the middle of our current anxiety. God who comes,  
C - Fill us with hope.

A - O come, O come, Emmanuel. Our world is groaning under the combined weight of neglect, cynicism and despair. We **do** care about your creation, yet we are not always sure how to respond. Give us a vision of where we need to go, and give us the courage to take one step. God who comes,  
C - Fill us with hope.

A - O come, O come, Emmanuel. Your coming has formed us into a community of care and hope. Provide your church the faith we need to respond to your coming, and to share that hope with all around us. God who comes,  
C - Fill us with hope.

A - O come, O come, Emmanuel. Come to our hospital rooms, our jail cells, our homeless shelters, and our homes. Open us to your Advent among all the hurting people of this world, especially those we name before you.

*[Long silence]*

God who comes,

C - Fill us with hope.

A - O come, O come, Emmanuel. Show us how you are entering our realities, and kindle hope within us, that, with Elizabeth and Mary, we, too, might sing of your coming. God who comes,  
C - Fill us with hope.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.