

WORSHIP AT HOME

Having Eyes to See | Having Ears to Hear | Prompts Action

Stay at Home Orders

God gave Noah stay on the Ark Orders.

God told Moses to order His people to stay at home on the night of Passover.

God gave Elijah orders to stay in the Widow's home.

God gave Joseph stay in Egypt orders.

In Person Worship

We will have two services on Sunday, December 20th, at 10 am and 11 am. The 10 am service will be on Facebook Live. They will both offer Music and reading of the Christmas Story from Luke.

Like Moses, I encourage you to Stay at Home and join us on Facebook. Your life is more precious to me than an attendance record.



REFUSING TO BE COMFORTED

CHAPTER 4
SUNDAY DECEMBER 20

Lighting the Advent Candle

ADVENT CANDLE: LOVE

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for





Christmas Eve

This is a drop - in -experience from 5pm-7pm!

- Enter through the Fellowship Hall.
- Expect to be seated in the Fellowship Hall and receive a self guided meditation that will prepare your heart, soul, and mind to receive Holy Communion.
- Your family/group will be led by an usher into the sanctuary.
- Expect to enter the Sanctuary to receive and kiss the hand of God. You will be seated at a table. You will receive a blessing, Holy Communion, and a Candle to Light. You will leave your lit candle in a container of sand as a sign of being the Light of the Christ's Love for the World. After a time of prayer you will be led through the Fellowship Hall to "Go in Christ Peace."
- The Tables will be sanitized between seatings. This is a service of Patience and Kindness that teaches us not to insist on our ways, traditions, or agenda's!

righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Advent means we watch and wait for Christ's coming. Christ comes to give Love to "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness". Disciples of Christ receive Love and give Love to God, self, and neighbor.

Joseph hungers and thirst for righteousness. He received Christ's Hope, Peace, and Joy. Hope fills hearts and minds with peace. He received Mary! Peace gives and receives kindness in disturbing circumstances. Joy celebrates the Hope and Peace of Christ's presence in all of life's disturbances. Hopeless people insist on their way. Like Herod, they refuse to be comforted by anything other than power, control, and sacrifice of neighbors.

This week speak with loved ones about your hunger and thirst for righteousness. Look for Christ coming into your ways to give you Hope, Peace, and Joy. Let these ways fill your heart and mind. Notice what happens in your soul. The soul filled with Hope, Joy, and Peace receives God's Unconditional Love. Let Love overflow to your neighbor!

Hearing and Receiving God's Word



ACT FOUR: "Refusing to be comforted."

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the

Magi. **17** Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18

"A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more."

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt **20** and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. **22** But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, **23** and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Pastor’s Prayer

Father, through Christ you reveal your desire to bless “the poor in spirit”. Your will being done on earth as it is in heaven comforts those who mourn. Receiving the earth as an inheritance fills our hearts and minds with a hunger and thirst for You, alone. Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for mercy that flows like a cleansing, healing river. Holy Spirit, teach us that fear is for giving to God. Holy Spirit Teach us that faith is for receiving Christ’s Hope, Peace, and Joy! Amen.

The Message

Matthew begins his Good News story with genealogy. God’s purpose for sending Joseph, Mary, and infant Jesus to live Egypt is wrapped up in Rachel “refusing to be comforted”.

Before Abram and Sari received Isaac, their son, God said his “Great Nation” would live 400 years in exile. (Genesis 15:12-16) Issac had two sons, twins, Esau and Jacob. Jacob is tricked into marrying sisters, Leah and Rachel. Leah gives Jacob 10 sons. Rachel is barren. The shame and guilt of being childless leaves her “poor in spirit” and mourning without Hope of comfort. She receives comfort and joy in giving birth to Benjamin and Joseph. She dies giving birth to Joseph. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery. He was carried into Egypt where he rose to be the second most powerful person in all of Egypt. Joseph was Pharaoh’s righthand.

God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father. Jesus was born of Mary to save people from sin. Jesus is God with us like the Good Shepherd who lays down his life to deliver his sheep from evil. On the cross of shame and guilt The Good Shepherd suffers all peoples’ sin. In Jesus’ resurrection we experience the healing power of receiving Christ’s Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Modern day Magi tell us that the Christmas Star will once again shine its light on the longest night of the year. It has not been seen since the 13th century.¹ The World sits in the

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiecartereurope/2020/12/15/how-you-can-see-the-once-in-10-lifetimes-christmas-star-or-star-of-bethlehem-this-week-with-your-naked-eyes/?sh=4a29dae93299>

darkness of a pandemic the ancient Egyptians called plagues. The people of the most powerful nation on earth sit in fear of who shall emerge as President, Herod. As Christmas gifts are wrapped and placed beneath LED lit, artificial, evergreen trees people “refuse to be comforted.”

Some are like Herod. They refuse to be comforted by anything less than power and control. Sacrificing life is the price of keeping peace. Others are fervent followers of their visionary messiah. Look, here is our savior, deliverer, and mighty healer. When this one, or that one, fails to conserve enough, be liberal enough, or progressive enough people cry impeach, impeach.

God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

And on earth, people are like waves of the sea tossed to and fro. Like Rachel, we refuse to be comforted. God desires to bless us with Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

This Advent I have watched and waited. I never considered how Fear and Faith have everything in common. They both have eyes to see, ears to hear, and move us with decisive actions.

Fear opens our eyes and ears to shame, guilt, and blame. It moves us with decisive actions where we fight, play dead, or run.

Faith opens our eyes and ears to God’s mercy, grace, and love. It moves us with decisive action to live with Hope, Peace, and Joy. Faith always leads us in WORSHIP!

Hear the Good News! God is with us in our fear! God is with us like a Shepherd who delivers his sheep from evil. Once delivered from evil, the Good Shepherd tends to the sheep’s wounds. The Shepherd knows the sheep by name. The sheep know the sound of the Shepherd’s voice.

Fear refuses to be comforted. This is why there will always be wars, rumors of war, famines, and nation against nation.

Faith receives Christ, the King of Heaven and Earth. Christ prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies — shame, guilt, blame, fighting, playing dead, and running. Faith means we give God our fear to receive the fruit of Love: Hope, Peace, and Joy.

Advent means we watch and wait for the coming Christ. Fear is for giving to God. Faith is for receiving Christ. Amen.

Joy to the World! And on earth, peace be with those who receive God’s blessed favor.

For 26 years I encouraged people to attend church. Pastors are taught to get people in the Church Building. Those who have gains in attendance, balance the church budget, pay their conference tithes, and act morally pure are rewarded with bigger Churches and salaries.

Have I sold my soul? Have I been tempting people all these years to theirs.

Christmas is days away. It is the one day that people fill the pews. With Christmas comes charitable tax write offs that balance the church budget. So why am I encouraging people to stay at home?

Have I sold my soul? Or has my soul become so “disquieted” that it refuses to be comforted?

This Christmas I identify with Rachel far more than Joseph, Mary, Wisemen, or Shepherds. Rachel refused to be comforted!

I know, right about now your thinking, Who is Rachel? I have never seen Rachel appear in the Church’s Christmas Play. Have you never watched Desperate House Wives: Israel? Do you not know that Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy serve as the plot for Soap Operas?

1 This is the genealogy^[a] of Jesus the Messiah^[b] the son of David, the son of Abraham:

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

You think I am joking! Rachel is the Love of Jacob’s life. Laban is Rachel’s dad. He gives Rachel to Jacob in marriage. On the wedding night Jacob removes Rachel’s veil. Laban tricked Jacob. Laban gave him Leah, Rachel’s sister. Jacob made a deal with Laban to grow his herd of sheep. In return Jacob would receive the love of his life.

Let’s stop for a moment. How many of the 10 Commandments did Laban, Jacob, Rachel, and Leah break? The Commandment teach us fear of sin, not the way of mercy!

After years of drama Jacob and Rachel are wed. Rachel refused to be comforted by Love. Love is seldom enough! Jacob and Leah have children. Rachel is barren. After much begging and pleading with God, Rachel gives birth to Benjamin. Like, Lays Potato Chips, one son is not enough. Rachel dies giving birth to Joseph. You know, the brother who wore the coat of many colors.

His brothers sell Joseph into slavery. He was carried into Egypt where he rose in power and authority. Joseph became Pharaoh's righthand man. Now, do you understand why Rachel refused to be comforted?

Like Rachel, we claim John 3:16 but refuse to be comforted by Love. Admit it; Love is seldom enough for troubled minds and broken hearts. We want the get even, win, prove ourselves right and good. I remember standing on the front porch of Spring Creek UMC after Bible study on Wednesday nights. I miss those times with Bobby Trotter. Often I would ask Wiseman, Bobby, do you think God's love is enough? He always answered the same way, I am not sure but I hope so. We were two men admitting to one another that like Rachel we refuse to be comforted.

Like Jacob we busy ourselves growing someone's herd to earn Love. Admit it; we been taught to earn God's Love? Does your mind constantly rationalize things you must do to enter heaven. How many awards, trophies, degrees and victories must we have to enter heaven?

Like Joseph our brothers and sisters sell us into slavery. Admit it; we use the Law, Ethics and Morals to control one another. Does your heart constantly make you feel you can never be Good enough to enter heaven.

Have I sold my soul? No, my soul refuses to be comforted by anything other than Love that freely flows through Hope, that makes Peace with sin and death, and rises to discovery Life is a Joy.

This Christmas:

Give God your broken heart and receive Hope.

Give God your troubled mind and receive Peace

Give God your disquieted soul and receive Joy.

Only then will we Love as God Loves!

Sunday school

I feel a bit like the grinch.

- This Advent my eyes have been opened to see how much fear and faith share in common.
- Fear and Faith both have eyes to see, ears to hear, and take decisive action.
- Fear tempts us to fight, play dead, and run. Its decisive actions are shame, guilt and blame. Most days when I read the news, listen to NPR, Fox News, or CNBC I am feel like I am in Bethlehem, trembling in fear of what this Herod, or that Herod will do next.
- Faith delivers us from fear. Faith gives us peace, patience, and kindness. It receives love and gives love.

Have you noticed the amount of fear in the Christmas Story?

- Joseph is afraid to receive Mary: she has disgraced him.
 - His fear comes from trying to be righteous according to the Law of Moses
- King Herod hears about Jesus birth. He and all of Jerusalem are filled with fear.
 - It appears that Herod is afraid of losing power, authority and control.
 - The people of Jerusalem are afraid of Herod's civil Law.
- Joseph and Mary flee Bethlehem. They fear Herod will find and kill the Christ Child.
- At each juncture Jesus' life hinges on Joseph's faith delivering him from fear.
- Please call or write me and tell me how anything has changed. God trusted Mary and Joseph with Jesus' life. Jesus trust us with his body, the Church.
- Fear begins as survival skills. Our parents taught us to fear of fire, electrical outlets, heights, water. By the time we were 4 or 5 years old we learned to survive by being right and good, so that bad things don't happen.
- Free of fire, snakes, and the like make sense.
- Fear of making a mistake breaks hearts and destroys minds.
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18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about^[d]: 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. **19** Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^[e] did not want to expose her to **public disgrace**, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 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.** **21** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^[f] because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: **23** “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”^[g] (which means “God with us”).

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25** But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem **2** and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. **5** “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6
“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”^[b]”

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **11** On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Escape to Egypt

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “**Get up,**” he said, “**take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.**”

14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, **15** where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”^[c]

16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

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The Return to Nazareth