

“CALM AND BRIGHT”
“Hope in the Midst of Fear”

Advent is a season of expectation, hope and promise. Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Even though tomorrow is Christmas Eve, in a sense, there is no more time to prepare, as the birth of Jesus is upon us. We can feel like things are not very *“calm and bright.”* Maybe if we are honest, we sometimes feel bleak in a way, with all the hype and expectation. The promise of Emmanuel, God-with-us, is a promise that God is there in everything we experience. Sometimes our life is going smoothly, sometimes the ride is bumpy, but in all things God is there. This week, may you find a way to experience the birth of Christ in a new way with an open heart and spirit. Merry Christmas!!! ---Pastor Cindy

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon: **“Hope in the Midst of Fear”**

God of wondrous surprises, you make a light to shine in the darkness; a light which nothing can ever smother. Grant that we who celebrate Christ's birth, may attain the fullness of joy as we serve him day by day, that the world may discover that it too is filled with his glory. In his holy name we pray. Amen.
(Bruce Prewer)

This week's sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

Monday, December 24, 2018 Isaiah 9: 2-7

Today is Christmas Eve. Every year on this night, it is traditional to read this beautiful word of hope from Isaiah. These verses are a response to Israel the northern kingdom being overrun by the Assyrians. (That is in verse one that is usually not read.) The people of Judah were of course concerned. The promise is that a people walking in darkness will see a great light. They will experience joy, hope, love and peace at the coming of the Messiah. *"For unto us a child is born, a song is given."* We celebrate these verses and understand them to speak of Jesus. We are still waiting for the endless peace that is foretold, but the promise will be fulfilled. God will do it. Tonight we will light candles and pray for peace, hope, joy and love to be made real in our world. We will pray that all will be *"calm and bright."* Today say a pray for peace, for love, for hope, for joy and for the LIGHT to dispel the darkness of our world.

Tuesday, December 25, 2018 Luke 2: 1-14

Merry Christmas! Today we celebrate the birth of God-with-us, Jesus. It is the first day of Christmas. As you read those first few verses, can you hear the sounds, feel the excitement and the fatigue? Can you experience the promise inherent in this wonderful story of Jesus' birth? Perhaps you too experience fatigue and excitement today, or perhaps it is not a very busy day as you have already celebrated or will be celebrating later. Find a quiet space and time on this holy and sacred day to say thank you and feel again God's love and grace for you, for us, born this day. Think of how you might experience all that is *"calm and bright"* this year and always. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace for those with whom God is well pleased!"

Wednesday, December 26, 2018 Luke 1: 46-55

Today is the second day of Christmas and the feast of St. Stephen (the first deacon and martyr) In the United Kingdom it is also known as "Boxing Day." It may seem odd to us that the day after Christmas we honor the first Christian Martyr, but he was also remembered for his willingness to serve the less fortunate and needy. Boxing Day began as a day for those who had more (particularly the upper class in Great Britain) to give boxes of food and clothing and necessities to those laborers and servants who worked for them. In Mary's song, she speaks of the lowly being lifted and the full rich being sent away empty. How do you find ways during this season to serve those less fortunate and make the world a better place? How do you serve and witness and give in the name of Jesus?

Thursday, December 27, 2018 Matthew 1: 18-21

Today is the third day of Christmas. This is the beginning of Matthew's version of the Christmas story. Luke focuses on Mary and Matthew focuses on Joseph. We heard this version on Sunday morning and the Luke version Monday evening. Joseph tends to be a prop in most nativities. There are a few mentions of Joseph in the carols, but mostly the focus is on Mary. Like Mary, the angel comes to Joseph and says "don't be afraid." How can Christmas make us afraid? Well, the angel encourages Joseph because the whole world will think he's crazy. The angel encourages Joseph to embrace and accept Mary even when nothing makes sense. The same is true for us. Don't be afraid, the angel tells us. God in Christ makes all things "calm and bright" On this day may God's love calm you and give you peace.

Friday, December 28, 2018 Matthew 1: 22-25

Today is the fourth day of Christmas. Joseph brings Mary home. He takes in when other would have thrown her out. He loves and accepts her. After the birth of her child, they name him Jesus, or Emmanuel, God-with-us. Did you ever wonder how hard it must have been for them? The whispers and weird looks they would have received? And yet.....they stayed the course, they believed that God would see them through. Christmas invites all of us to trust that God is with us and all will be *"Calm and Bright."* How will you allow God to calm your heart and spirit this Christmas season?