

Hanging of the Greens Service: 2015

Prelude

Words of Welcome: Mary Jo Fox

*Call to Worship: Mary Jo Fox

One: Today we come together to begin our preparations for the birth of our Savior.

All: Today we make ready our welcome for God's only Son, Jesus.

One: As we enter into the holy season of Advent, a season of reflection and anticipation, let us clear our minds and open our hearts to the coming of the Christ.

All: Let us honor Christ's birth by adorning our church for the coming of our Savior.

One: Let our songs and symbols represent the incarnation of God's love in the world.

**All: "Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you."
(Isaiah 60:1-2)**

Opening Hymn: 119: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (vs. 1, 2, 4)

The Lord's Prayer: Mary Jo Fox

One: As we wait for the coming of the Lord, we pray in hope these words our Lord taught us to pray.

All: Our Father....

Passing of the Peace

Scripture Reading: 2 Kings 22:1-11, 23:1-3 (The Message)

Josiah was eight years old when he became king. He ruled for thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath. He lived the way God wanted. He kept straight on the path blazed by his ancestor David, not one step to either left or right.

One day in the eighteenth year of his kingship, King Josiah sent the royal secretary Shaphan son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to The Temple of God with instructions: "Go to Hilkiah the high priest and have him count the money that has been brought to The Temple of God that the doormen have collected from the people. Have them turn it over to the foremen who are managing the work on The Temple of God so they can pay the workers who are repairing God's Temple, all the carpenters, construction workers, and masons. Also, authorize them to buy the lumber and dressed stone for The Temple repairs. You don't need to get a receipt for the money you give them—they're all honest men."

The high priest Hilkiah reported to Shaphan the royal secretary, "I've just found the Book of God's Revelation, instructing us in God's ways. I found it in The Temple!" He gave it to Shaphan and Shaphan read it. Then Shaphan the royal secretary came back to

the king and gave him an account of what had gone on: “Your servants have bagged up the money that has been collected for The Temple; they have given it to the foremen to pay The Temple workers.” Then Shaphan the royal secretary told the king, “Hilkiah the priest gave me a book.” Shaphan proceeded to read it to the king. When the king heard what was written in the book, God’s Revelation, he ripped his robes in dismay.

The king acted immediately, assembling all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. Then the king proceeded to The Temple of God, bringing everyone in his train—priests and prophets and people ranging from the famous to the unknown. Then he read out publicly everything written in the Book of the Covenant that was found in The Temple of God. The king stood by the pillar and before God solemnly committed them all to the covenant: to follow God believingly and obediently; to follow his instructions, heart and soul, on what to believe and do; to put into practice the entire covenant, all that was written in the book. The people stood in affirmation; their commitment was unanimous.

The Meaning of this Service: Reclaiming Tradition: Pastor Travis

The Hanging of the Greens: Pastor Marti

Marti introduces with a brief history of greens. Children are in back with Sunday School teachers, and then are led in to decorate the pews and Choir loft wall with greenery, while congregation sings.

Song: 148 - “O Come, All Ye Faithful” (Vs. 1, 2, 4)

Placing of the Advent Wreath: Pastor Marti

Marti introduces with a brief history of the wreath, then invites the congregation to sing after an extended intro to song, *Mundil Family* processes from back. Dan carries stand/wreath. Joseph and Dawn carry four candles. Thomas and Nathan carry 1st candle and flame (doesn’t matter who).

Song: 132 - “When God Is a Child” (vs. 1)

Lighting of the First Advent Candle: Mundil Family

One: Something’s coming.

All: We’re waiting. We’re eager.

One: It’s more than presents.

All: It’s more than lights.

One: We open the Book of Hope and read the promise.

All: God will be with us.

One: Our hearts are glad; we trust God’s holy name.

All: God’s never-ending love surrounds us.

One: Today we light the candle of Hope.

(Light the first candle.)

All: Our hope is in the Lord, Emmanuel, God with us.

Response Song: 134: “Emmanuel, Emmanuel”

Hanging of the Paraments: Mary Jo Fox

Mary Jo reads explanation of the paraments and their meaning. She will hang the one on the pulpit. Doug Pierce and Don Darnell hang wall hangings (two in chancel, one on side wall) during reading.

“An English Advent Carol” - Gary Fox and Lori Van Dyk

The History of the Christmas Tree: Margo Murillo

Begin with a recounting of the meaning of the Christmas Tree and the lights.

Meaning of the Chrismons

People come to mic, read the meaning of their Chrismon, place it on tree, then return to seat.

Intro to “O Christmas Tree”: Kim Ward

A brief intro to “O Christmas Tree”

Song: O Christmas Tree (Don Darnell will plug in the tree while we sing this song)

*O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
How lovely are your branches!
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
How lovely are your branches!
In beauty green will always grow
Through summer sun and winter snow.
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
How lovely are your branches!*

*O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
Your beauty green will teach me.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
Your beauty green will teach me.
That hope and love will ever be
The way to joy and peace for me.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
Your beauty green will teach me.*

History of the Nativity Scene: Pastor Marti

Pastor Marti (Marti will tell a bit about the history of the nativity scene. Then during the singing of a song, teenagers will bring in the ceramic nativity pieces and place them around the tree.)

Song: 147: “Away in a Manger” (vs. 1 and 2)

Placing of the Children’s Nativity Scene: Pastor Marti and Children

Song: 147: “Away in a Manger” (vs. 3)

Setting the Table: Pastor Travis

This is the invitation to communion. After Travis sets up communion, then Doug and Kathy Pierce, Cathie Elkin, and Betsy Durham will bring the communion elements from the back.

Communion Hymn: 422: Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ

Words of Institution: Pastor Travis

***Receiving Communion**

Use the normal 8:30 communion instructions. Up Front, three sets of servers by intinction. Have Leave offerings up front. Mike Davis in back to serve those who remain seated. Form a circle after.

***Benediction**

***Closing Song: 125: “Come, O Long-expected Jesus”**

Postlude

Speaking Parts:

The Meaning of this Service: Reclaiming Tradition: Pastor Travis

Tradition. It's become a fighting word. In the worship wars of the church, lines were drawn between contemporary and traditional styles. Tradition of the elders. Tradition of the nation. Faith traditions. Tradition. Tradition. Tradition.

It's become a fighting word. But it is a beautiful word. A word steeped in meaning and history. Tradition--it's where we've come from. It's all that's gone before. It's a faith handed down to us, generation to generation to generation. The Tradition.

This time of year, more than any other, we are covered in tradition. From trees and wreaths, to carols and nativities. Stories told, year after year. Songs sung, year after year. Foods eaten, year after year. Tradition.

Mary Jo read to us our scripture for the first Sunday of Advent, a text that comes to us from deep, deep in the tradition. It arrives to us from the history of Judah, years after the kingdom of Israel had divided into two nations, Israel and Judah. Judah was home to Jerusalem, and also to that small, but historically significant town of Bethlehem. Judah had some pretty nasty kings, but in this text, a good one arises. Josiah. Only 8 years old when he becomes king, and 26 years old when the events in the text takes place. Rather untraditional, if you ask me.

But young king Josiah is one of the best kings Judah had. He is given the news that the Law of God has been accidentally found in a temple renovation project. Long forgotten, now discovered, texts from their tradition. The earliest accounts of their ancestors and

their journey with God. They didn't even know they existed, much less that they had lost them. But here they are. God's instructions to God's people.

After Josiah reads them, the Good King gathers the entire nation together, and has the long lost tradition read before all the people. Hearing God's instruction, they people repent, and revival spreads across Judah.

Soon enough, the people would turn away again, as "the people" always do. But scholars believe that this moment in history might have led to the formation of what we now call the "Old Testament" or the Hebrew Bible. The writings found that day were the ancient stories, texts from the people of Israel, that years later were used in the formation and editing of the very first books of the Bible. Without this event, there may never have been an Old Testament tradition.

Tradition recovered, reinterpreted and preserved.

See, that's how it always is with tradition. It doesn't just come to us, untouched by the ages. It comes to us through people and times, interpreted and passed on. As times change, the tradition adapts, yet through it all, there is a cord that keeps the tradition tethered to the beginning.

Today, we return to two traditions of our church. First, we are worshipping together. Although we've been a church of two services for 20 years, before that for 126 years, we worshipped in one service. We return to that tradition, but we do so in a new way. We are a different church than we were 20 years ago.

We also return to our Hanging of the Greens service. I'm not sure when the last time we did this service was...but it's been a while. Yet, this service was one that created many great memories in the past. The particularities of our old Hanging of the Greens tradition have been, mostly, lost, but today we reinterpret them, taking the tradition and making it applicable in our time and our place.

As we do this, we kick off the season of Advent. It is a holy time that we return to year after year to remind us of the traditions of our faith. That ours is a Christian faith born in a barn in Bethlehem. But we do not just remember. We reinterpret. We ask, What does such a faith look like, today? What do these practices we do every year mean, and how does their meaning transform us into the people of God in our day and time?

In the hanging of the greens, we decorate our church with the symbols of our tradition. Why do we do this? To tell the story again, to make the traditions of our faith alive, and to proclaim throughout all times, in all places, through all means, that Christ has come, Christ is come, and Christ will come again.

The Hanging of the Greens: Pastor Marti

Evergreens have long been considered a symbol of eternity, just like God's everlasting nature. Ancient people viewed evergreen with awe and wonder because of its changeless nature. Isaiah 60:13 tells us: "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary." Though

evergreens have long been viewed with reverence, it has only been in the past four centuries that Christians have used evergreen to decorate their homes and sanctuaries. The evergreen we use reminds us of God's vastness, God's abiding love in Jesus Christ, and of our never ending fellowship with God when Christ is our Lord.

The Advent custom of decorating with evergreen branches comes to us from the peasants of the Middle Ages who believed that preparations should be made for the coming of Jesus. On the first Sunday of Advent, each family would gather evergreens and place them near the hearth in their home. We continue that tradition by hanging the greens in our congregational home, this sanctuary. The evergreen reminds us of God's abiding love in Jesus Christ and of our eternal relationship with God.

History of the Advent Wreath: Pastor Marti

This simple circle of evergreen branches testifies of the continuation of life and life without end. The four candles encircle the Christ candle to signify God's Son as the light of the world. The four candles represent the four weeks in Advent, and the four themes of Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Each Sunday we will light a candle and on Christmas Eve the Christ candle will be lit. With increasing brightness from the candles, we experience the Light of the world and find hope in the coming of Jesus.

Hanging of the Paraments: Mary Jo Fox

On the walls of our church, during Advent and throughout the year, we have beautiful pieces of art we call Paraments. "Paraments" is an old Latin word that is given to the cloths hung seasonally in a church.

We are blessed to have unique, handmade paraments by our own church member, Mary Johnson. Mary brings her quilting and sewing skills together with a keen awareness of the Christian year to create these one-of-a-kind pieces of art. She's been told she could make a lot of money if she sold her work, but she doesn't do it for money. She creates these pieces it as a blessing to her church family at worship.

The Paraments we hang today for Advent are some of the prettiest Mary has made for us. We will hang a set of three that, together, depict the journey to Bethlehem for the birth and adoration of Jesus. Notice that in all of them the baby Jesus is not present, for this is Advent and we are still awaiting the Messiah. Mary is still pregnant as she rides on the donkey, and the manger is still empty, as we wait for the coming of the Lord.

Also, along our South wall, we will hang a blue banner every week of Advent, which corresponds to the theme of the Advent candle we will light each Sunday. The first Sunday of Advent is, traditionally, the Sunday of Hope, and so today we hang the Hope banner.

As our paraments are hung, we will be blessed with an "English Advent Carol", sung by Gary Fox and Lori Van Dyk.

The History of the Christmas Tree: Margo Murillo

Long before the advent of Christianity, plants and trees that remained green all year had a special meaning for people in the winter. It was believed that hanging evergreens in your home would keep away evil spirits and illness.

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition in the 16th century when devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes, and Martin Luther, the 16th-century Protestant reformer, is credited with first adding lighted candles to a tree. Walking toward his home one winter evening, he was awed by the brilliance of stars twinkling amidst evergreens. To recapture the scene for his family, he erected a tree in the main room and wired its branches with lighted candles.

In the 1800s, German settlers introduced the Christmas Tree to the United States. By 1883, the Sears and Roebuck Company began selling the first artificial Christmas trees – 33 limbs for \$.50 and 55 limbs for \$1.00.

For Christians, the use of an Evergreen Tree at Christmas time reminds us of the eternal presence of our Lord and the eternal life we find in Christ. The small white lights used on our tree represent each person who makes up the Body of Christ. By working together, as do all of these lights, we can shine as brightly in our city as a light of Christ.

Meaning of the Chrismons: Mary Jo Fox

Our Christmas Tree has another name. It's also a Chrismon tree. The Chrismon tree is decorated with traditional and modified ancient Christian symbols, called Chrismons. The word "Chrismon" comes from a combination of "Christ's Monograms."

Our chrismons have been hand-stitched over the years by members of our own church, making them even more meaningful to us today. Each one is unique, containing a Christian symbol that represents Christ. We now invite those who will hang the remaining Chrismons to come forward and tell us the meaning of the Chrismon you hang.

Intro to "O Christmas Tree": Kim Ward

Way back in 1550 in Germany, after the first Christmas Trees were being decorated by German Christians, an unknown composer wrote the song we're about to sing. In German, it's "O Tannenbaum", set to an old folk melody. The song reminds us that this tree is not here simply as a decoration, but it is here to teach us, to remind us that our Lord is always and everywhere with us.

While we sing, our tree will be lighted, and as we see the lights being lit, may we be reminded of the love of our church family and the love of God whose love never fades.

History of the Nativity Scene: Pastor Marti

Possibly the best known Christmas decorating tradition is the scene of Bethlehem, where the birth took place. There was a stable filled with animals, shepherds, and angels. Mary and Joseph watched in wonder as visitors came searching for their child, baby Jesus. St. Francis is credited with creating the first Nativity scene in the year 1223, inspired by a recent visit to the Holy Land. Since then, Christians have followed his example. Today, we set this scene before us during the Advent season as a reminder of God's gift to us.

Placing of the Children's Nativity Scene: Pastor Marti and Children

We love our nice decorations of porcelain and gold, but we also appreciate the attributes of unbreakable plastic. We want the story of Jesus' birth to be accessible for people of all ages to ask questions, move things around, to play and enjoy the birth of our Savior. Part of our sanctuary decorations include this Little People Nativity Scene. This is the nativity that anyone can come and play with, move around and enjoy. During this third verse of Away in a Manger, kids, I would like for you to set up our Children's Nativity Scene.

Setting the Table: Pastor Travis

We've hung greens and paraments. We've placed candles and nativity scenes. And now we come to this table. It's a table we return to, not once a year or once every quarter, but once every week. This tradition, more than any other, shapes who we are as Disciples of Christ, and what it means for us to be followers of Christ in our world today.

While some Christians may call this an "altar", we call it a table. Our focus is not on a sacrifice made on an altar, but a meal, prepared by Jesus for his disciples. The meal is simple, bread and wine, traditions past to us from the very beginning of Christianity. Some churches have used unleavened bread, bread without yeast. We use some of both. On the night of the Last Supper, their bread was leavened. Just ordinary table bread and ordinary table wine. Throughout history, we've tried to make it more special. One thousand years after Christ, the Western church started using unleavened bread--it was more special, they thought. Theologies developed that said that the bread and wine actually became the flesh and blood of Christ. Why? Because it needed to be special. Unique.

Later, Christians started celebrating communion less and less frequently. If you do it every Sunday, it was reasoned, it will lose its meaning.

Yet, in the midst of making communion special and unique, the church began to shut out people from this table. Divisions grew. Lines were drawn. Only those who believed the right, special things about Communion were allowed to take of it. In making the table special, the church made the table inaccessible, perverting its very origin.

Don't get me wrong--this table is special. Deeply special. But it is special, not because of magic or mystery, not because of exclusion or secrets. It is special because it is accessible. It is for all. In the midst of all the divisions of this world, here is a table that is set in the presence of enemies--a table where the diverse body of Christ can put itself back together again.

It is special, much like the very first nativity scene in Bethlehem was special--not because it was gaudy or rich or famous, but because it was so utterly ordinary. Our faith tradition was born in the stable and at the table.

Today, we will take communion by intinction. That means that instead of passing trays, we will get up and come forward for communion, tearing a piece of bread off and dipping it into the cup. This is, in fact, a very traditional practice of taking communion--one of

the oldest known. But we do it today, not because it's an old practice, but because it is a way for us to reclaim a bit of the "communal" nation of communion.

One of the beloved traditions of our 8:30 worship service has been coming forward to receive communion. It gets us out of our seats. Forces us to interact with one another--to commune with one another. You are served communion, instead of serving yourself. You stand with your sisters and your brothers. This is, truly, what communion is about--sharing a meal with your family.

As you come today, we invite you to come with some noise. Speak to the people around. Shake hands and share a hug. Tell a story. Have a laugh. This is a family table. It is a special and holy time, because we are family and Christ has brought us all together today to celebrate that we are, indeed, one body of Christ.

Let us now sing a hymn, as we prepare to come to the table.