

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Many who light the fourth candle of Advent, do so particularly remembering the moment that Mary received the news of Christ's coming through the visit of an Angel. God's purposes are already declared, but this is the earthly beginning of the Messiah's coming. In some traditions the candle is lit to speak directly of the Christ-child; others describe it as the candle of peace – the fourth element that seeks to express something of our Gospel identity. We seek to draw these elements together and particularly remember that saying "yes" to God's purposes involves embracing the narratives of truth and justice that lie at the heart of our Gospel story.

LUKE 1:50-55

*His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants for ever, just as he promised our ancestors.*

The candles of Advent burn
Their flickering lights speak of the hope, the love, the joy
That is ours through Christ who has come
And is coming into our world.

We light the flame of peace
In the midst of a world that is wracked with conflict and unrest,
Yet one in which goodness still overcomes evil
Where darkness can never prevail against light.

Together we remember, how centuries ago
The voice of an angel spoke words of favour to a startled young woman
Announcing that God would be with her; that salvation would come
Even though the pathway ahead would not be an easy one.

It was in God's presence that her peace was found
Not by avoiding the heartless decrees of a tyrannical regime
Or escaping the judgement of those who assumed the worst of her
Peace, even as she faced their every consequence on a stable floor.

God's promise and God's purpose were enough
Enough for her to embrace the narrative of eternity;
To set aside self-interest for humanity's salvation;
And declare with world-changing simplicity "let it be to me"

So let us see enough in her profound example,
To declare our own “yes” to God’s eternal will and decree.
Where God’s Word calls for justice, and end to oppression
May we be no less willing to submit to its ways.

So may we know God’s peace as we await God’s coming
As we empty ourselves of pride and raise the cause of those in need
As we fill with good things the hands of those who long for enough
That all of humanity might see and know that God has come to us.

**God of peace
Whose earthly coming
Began amidst the everyday life and struggle
Of a human family.**

**May our lives and actions
Reflect the light and truth that we once again embrace
So that every earthly family
Might know that a Saviour has come.**

**Where mouths remain hungry
And hands remain empty;
Where the gifts of your earth
Are locked away by greed and self-interest,
May hope and justice be born through us
As we walk the pathways of your Kingdom’s dawn,**

AMEN

