

Sunday Gathering Liturgy

From Isolation—Into
Community, Luke 2:8-20 -
Bradley Bell

December 12, 2021

Advent: From Darkness—Into
Light

Call to Worship - Isaiah 9:6

As you can see this morning, our church has a tradition of lighting Advent candles as a way of tangibly picturing the light of Jesus Christ coming into the darkness of our world. We are going to light them a bit differently this year in order to coincide with our sermon series titled "From Darkness—Into Light". The first candle that is lit today actually represents the theme of peace, because the subject of today's sermon is "From Isolation—Into Community". In other words, because God has made peace with those who trust in Jesus Christ, they are invited from isolation into community.

But you may be here this morning, and let's be honest, the peace ain't flowing. After the past two years there may be lingering hurts that make you uncomfortable in the presence of God and others. You know what—we're glad you found the courage to be here. And we pray that God will meet you with his peace.

This is the peace of which we speak in this season of Advent:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called

Congregation: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

Rejoice

O Come All Ye Faithful

Confession - Hebrews 10:24-25

When we say “From Isolation—Into Community,” what does that mean? What does that look like? How does it apply to us? If we are to move from darkness into light, then we need to confess our isolation, in order to open ourselves to God’s community. One of our members is now going to share what that has looked like for him:

Not too ago I found myself in the exact scenario the writer of Hebrews repeated warns against. What had begun as a slow drift from the Word of God soon became a riptide of bitterness and self-pity, carrying me out to dark seas. I felt like I was barely hanging on, a life devoid of prayer and true worship. My rare cameos at church were filled with faultfinding, nitpicking, and making excuses about why I didn’t fit in. Then a couple of years ago, an old friend invited me to Antioch and even though I started attending regularly, nothing else really changed; same stiff-neck and hard heart – hanging out in the periphery and unwilling to connect. The lockdowns came and went and I remained a half-hearted YouTube attender (Dave Priest might say I was in an online faction of spiritual lassitude). All joking aside, for me, internet church had become a sinfully convenient way to remain isolated from true Christian fellowship. Every week, our pastors remind us that we are blessed to be a blessing, but I was missing out on both – and suffered accordingly.

Psalms 136 says of God, it is He who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever...give thanks to the God of Heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever. I’m thankful to the Lord for two of the greatest words in all of Scripture – “but God” – I was in a low estate but God remembered me and called me from isolation into community, to declare His praises among the congregation! I’m thankful that it was Christ all along hanging onto me with an everlasting grip, rather than my failing strength. Early this year, the Holy Spirit smashed my excuses and through the encouragement and prayers of the pastors, I returned to in-person services and even joined a family group. This is basic church life at Antioch but at the time it seemed overwhelmingly difficult. I’m not gonna lie, it was nerve-racking to share my messed-up life in family group with brothers and sisters I barely knew – but they and so many of you showed me and my daughter the love of Christ; a love that will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick. I soon found myself back as a functioning member of the Body of Christ – maybe a toenail or a spleen, but a member, nonetheless. Christian love is also a sanctifying love that meets us where we are but doesn’t leave us in our low estate. By God’s grace, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the loving encouragement of many of you, my life is no longer devoid of prayer and true worship of the Living God. My family group even tells me sometimes that I am a source of encouragement to them – blessed to be a blessing, indeed. I’d like to end where I began – in the book of Hebrews, with a word of exhortation: today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. Instead, church, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as [we] see the Day drawing near. Amen!

Now, let’s make that into our prayer:

Lord, we are hearing your voice today. So help us to have soft hearts,

Congregation: not hardening them in rebellion

but considering how to stir up one another to love and good works;

Congregation: not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another, and all the more as we see the day of your return drawing near.

Amen.

Hark The Herald Angels Sing (Norton Hall)

Pastor Installation - 1 Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:17

Sermon - Luke 2:8-20

Communion - 1 Corinthians 11:23-28

King Of Kings

Angels We Have Heard On High

Announcements & Benediction - Ephesians 2:12-13

You may be seated. Thank you for joining us in today's gathering! We hope that you have experienced the welcome of Jesus.

First of all, in followup to today's sermon, we want to invite you and urge you to step out of isolation and into community by joining a Family Group.

1) Giving & Visitors - antiochpeople.org/give - We want to be a people who reflect the generosity of God at Advent. So this year we have a goal of raising \$5,000 for global missions, which will be divided among all our distributed members. We remind you that 2% of our annual budget is already designated to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, but if you'd still like to give to that, simply designate it on your check or on GivApp.

2) MCT Prayer Calendars - Another goal is to sell out our MCT prayer calendars. They are \$10 each. This is great opportunity to help us fulfill our commitment to pray for the members we have distributed among the nations.

Also, we want to remind you to share your Christmas cards with our distributed members (or just write them a note if you're behind on the Christmas cards). There is a box in the back of the auditorium, and also TODAY there is materials for kids to write their own cards in the training room.

4) Family Meeting - Covenant members, just a reminder there is a Family Meeting tonight, here at the building from 6-8 PM. Childcare will be provided as well as snacks. This will replace normal FG meetings for that week. We are still in need of a couple adult volunteers to fill a need in childcare tonight if you would like to serve in this way let Tammy Stayton know after the Gathering.

5) Food Pantry - Is this Saturday at 10AM - December food pantry is very meaningful to people and We always need volunteers to pull this off well. If you are not involved and want to be contact Bill Stayton.

We begin each gathering with a call to worship and we end with a benediction which simply is a reminder that we are blessed to be a blessing. I invite you to hold out your hands as a posture of receiving this blessing:

Church, remember that you were at one time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Therefore into a world still alienated may you go with haste, glorifying and praising God for all you have heard and seen. (based on Ephesians 2:12-13)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Let's say this together: We are sent.
