



Queen Anne

LUTHERAN CHURCH

Called to Proclaim God's Love in Christ for Every Person

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Sexton	John Bryant

✘ *In Worship Today* ✘

Pastor	The Rev. Dr. Dan Peterson
Cantor	Kyle Haugen
Gospel and Prayers	Lori Lynn Phillips,

This service of worship can also be seen online. Go to queenannelutheran.org and click on "WORD OUT" to find audio, video, and print resources for worship at home, as well as resources to use with children.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 20, 2020

“Word Out” audio transcript



Prelude

Variations on a French carol:

Joseph est bien marie (“Joseph Married Well”)

Michel Corrette (1707–1795)

Welcome

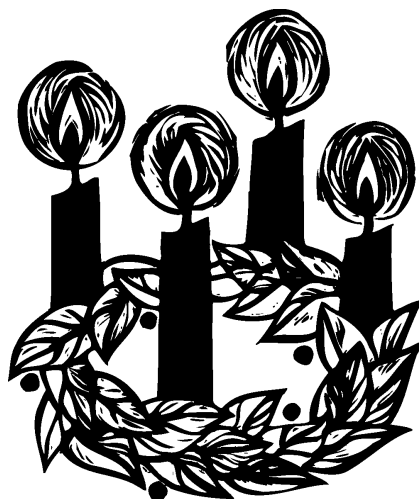
P: Welcome, this Fourth and final Sunday of Advent to Queen Anne Lutheran Church. Wherever you are listening, whatever challenges you might be facing, we invite you into this space: one where you can hear the good news in proclamation, spoken and sung; a time where you can be still, and know God is God.

In this Annunciation, Luke makes clear that God comes with good news for ordinary people from little-known places. This King will not be born to royalty in a palace, but to common folk in a stall; one early tradition even says a cave. Here, Luke highlights the role of the Spirit, a special emphasis in today’s Gospel.

Apostolic Greeting

P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

G: And also with you.



Gathering Hymn

stanza 4

Light One Candle

ELW 240



4 Light four can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.



He is com - ing, tell the glad tid - ings. Let your lights be shin - ing!

Gospel Acclamation

Luke 1:38

G:

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Repeat alleluia

P:

Here I am, the servant of the Lord;
let it be with me according to your word.

G:

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

The Holy Gospel:

Luke 1:26-38

A: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the first chapter.

G: Glory to you, O Lord.

A: ²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was

much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

A: The Gospel of the Lord.

G: Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Let It Be with Me
Pastor Dan Peterson

“Let it be with me.”

Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel after hearing the news that she, a teenager out of wedlock, would bear a child, “conceived,” as we say in our creeds, “by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Powerful words, not simply about the Holy Spirit but also about Mary: words of rare agency on the part of a woman who otherwise possessed virtually no voice in her time and culture.

“Let it be with me.”

Doctor, Doctor

This past week we learned, thanks to an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, that Dr. Jill Biden, soon to be our nation’s First Lady, is not a doctor, at least according to Joseph Epstein. That irksome title, he says, “sounds and feels

fraudulent” when used by people like Biden who hold doctorates outside of the sciences. Only medical doctors merit the designation.

“A wise man once said that no one should call himself doctor unless he has delivered a child,” Epstein writes. “Think about it, Dr. Jill, and forthwith drop the doc.”

Epstein proceeds to blast the title of “doctor” across the humanities and social sciences, and in one or two instances his argument has merit. He rightly criticizes the proliferation of honorary doctorates, for example. These once went to statesmen and serious scholars, he points out. Now they go to potential donors and celebrities who, unlike their predecessors, “don’t even bother feigning intelligence.”

Yet to someone looking for a substantive editorial in one of the nation’s most reputable newspapers, she or he will not find it here: much of the “evidence” Epstein cites is anecdotal. His claim, for instance, that the “PhD may once have held prestige, but . . . has been diminished by the erosion of seriousness and the relaxation of standards in university education generally,” rests, by his own admission, on “the few doctoral dissertations [he] sat in on during [his] teaching days.”

The few.

Epstein, in short, fails to make his case, even to someone like me – a former college professor inclined to agree that standards in higher education have fallen. Bitter biography and tales from a life of privilege are no substitute for a genuinely persuasive argument and evidence-based research to support it.

The real problem with this editorial, however, has nothing to do with the decline and fall of higher education in America. It’s the condescending, patronizing, and sexist attitude Epstein adopts toward the target of his ire, namely, the character and achievement of a woman who apparently does not “know her place.” You can hear it right from the beginning. “Madame First Lady,” Epstein writes, “Mrs. Biden – Jill – kiddo: a bit of advice on what may seem like a small but I think is a not unimportant matter.” Let go of your title, he tells her. Doctor “sounds and feels fraudulent, not to say a touch comic.”

Your dissertation, he adds (based simply on the title), sounds “unpromising,” and by the time you “acquired” your degree, standards in higher education had obviously fallen.

Epstein’s contempt for Biden and her use of the title “doctor” could not be more clear. His choice of words says it all, from the way he addresses her at the beginning as “kiddo” to the claim that she “acquired” (rather than earned) her degree. By way of conclusion he offers the advice he promised at the outset to Biden directly: “Forget the small thrill of being Dr. Jill, and settle for the larger thrill of living for the next four years in the best public housing in the world as First Lady Jill Biden.”

In other words, lose your voice and take your place at your husband’s side.

Words Attributed to Paul

Epstein’s misogyny obviously has a long history, both in American culture specifically and Western history more broadly. The Bible is no exception and (unfortunately in this case) part of that history.

In the New Testament alone, one can easily drudge up half a dozen passages to justify the subjugation and oppression of women. In 1 Timothy 2:11-14, for example, we read in words attributed to Paul that a woman should “learn in silence with full submission.” She should not teach or “have authority over a man. For Adam was formed first, then Eve,” the author says; “and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”

Colossians, likewise tells us, in words also attributed to Paul, that wives must “be subject to [their] husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (3:18). Ephesians 5:22 states much the same. “Wives,” it says, “be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.”

So-called “complementarians” utilize these passages to support their claim that men and women have different but complementary roles when it comes to raising a family, navigating marriage, and church leadership. They point out

that while a man, made in the image of God, has authority over his wife (made as she is in the image of man), that does not mean that he can mistreat her. After all, as Ephesians 5:33 says, “Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.”

Ephesians 5:33 quoted here seems like an attitude an egalitarian – one who advocates for total equality in marriage, relationships, or religious leadership, irrespective of role – could endorse. Unfortunately, as Dr. Jennifer Bird points out in the *New Testament Fortress Commentary on the Bible*, the word translated as “respect” in the translation we use (the New Revised Standard Version) comes from the Greek word *phoetai*, a cognate of *phobos*, which means “fear.” (This is where we get the English word “phobia.”) A translation closer to the original Greek would indicate that while a husband should love his wife as himself, a wife (along with household slaves) should *fear* her husband, which is precisely what the surrounding culture encouraged.

It is hard to imagine a happy marriage where a wife would fear her husband, knowing that she is merely a second-generation copy of the image of God. It is hard to imagine a happy marriage where a wife must “learn in silence with full submission.” Even if the Christian churches of the late first century softened the household hierarchies of the surrounding patriarchal Roman culture, they still reflected its perspective. The question is whether earlier in that century, especially in the letters scholars unanimously agree were written by Paul himself (rather than attributed to him) the Christian faith taught differently. The short answer is that it did.

In Christ All are Equal

I like to think of the early Christian community that Paul envisioned as an expression of budding egalitarianism, a community – illuminated by the gospel and in contrast to its surrounding culture – where men and women enjoyed real equality in Christ. There are two reasons why.

The first is from something Paul says directly. In Galatians 3:28 he writes, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no

longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Here we can assume that Paul understood the practical implications of this claim: that slaves should be freed (a position he advocates in Philemon with regard to a slave named Onesimus) and that men and women should enjoy equal roles in the Body of Christ, the church. There, too, we have evidence. In Romans 16:7, for instance, Paul mentions a woman named Junia whom he identifies as “prominent among the apostles.” He speaks as well of Prisca and Aquila, apparently wife and husband, who oversaw a house church *together*.

In each of these cases, we see a glimpse of egalitarianism, the kind that flies in the face of the “know your place” mentality Epstein lords over Biden, the kind that later authors writing in the name of Paul countered by establishing the very gender hierarchies that Paul destabilized. Bird ponders why: perhaps “the freedom and empowerment that women and slaves had experienced in the early [Christian] movement, which had been fully endorsed by Paul in his letters, might well have been perceived by outsiders as a threat to the social and political order.” That fear may have crept up among the male leadership of the later first-century church as well, fossilized for posterity in Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 Timothy.

“Let it Be with Me”

The most arresting glimpses of a budding egalitarianism between the sexes in the early Jesus movement undoubtedly come from the Gospels themselves. These writings generally treat women in a positive light: they are the ones who witness Jesus’ crucifixion, they are the first to discover his empty tomb, and they are the ones who support his ministry.

Yet long before all these occurrences it is Mary in today’s Gospel who merits our attention. Here the angel Gabriel visits her to share the news that she will conceive and bear a son. “How can this be,” she asks, “since I am a virgin?” Gabriel explains that she will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and that her relative Elizabeth will also bear a child even though she is barren. “For nothing,” the angel says, “will be impossible with God.”

One might expect Mary to have no voice in the matter. That would reflect the attitude of the surrounding culture. But things are different here. Mary has a voice, and without her consent God's plan, it would seem, goes no further. What kind of story about a loving God, after all, would begin with a forced pregnancy? All of it, we discover, rests with her.

Mary's compliance offers what Martin Luther regarded as perhaps the most noble expression of faith in the whole New Testament. "Here I am, the servant of the Lord," she says, "let it be with me according to your word." But it does more than that. It also gives her a voice. She is the one who must choose, not because it is her "place," but because it is her right. She has a voice, the freedom that God has given her to determine for herself whether she will participate in the unfolding of God's salvific plan or not.

The Good News

The Good News this Christmas, we discover, is not only the birth of Christ; it is also the dignity, agency, and freedom Mary possesses according to our Gospel reading for today. "Let it be with me," she tells the angel, granting her consent, trusting in God, and initiating what later generations would eventually refer to as the greatest story ever told.

Today, when men like Epstein deny the dignity and freedom of women by telling them to "know their place," let us remember the example of Mary, whose choice and dignity were respected by no less than God. This is her Gospel, and this is the Gospel of our Lord.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

WORDS: Charles Wesley, 1744; sung to the tune HYFRYDOL

1. Come, thou long - ex - spect - ed Je - sus, born to set thy
2. Born thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, born a child and

peo - ple free; from our fears and sins re - lease us,
yet a King, born to reign in us for - ev - er,

let us find our rest in thee. Is-rael's strength and con - so -
now thy gra-cious king - dom bring. By thine own e - ter - nal

la - tion, hope of all the earth thou art; dear de - sire of
spir - it rule in all our hearts a - lone; by thine all suf -

ev - ery na - tion, joy of ev - ery long - ing heart.
fi - cient mer - it, raise us to thy glo - rious throne.

Prayers of the Church

A: God of life and light, fulfill your promise and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

A brief silence.

A: Gracious God, all generations call you blessed. In this holy season we pray for our neighbors of other denominations and faiths. Inspire the faith of their people. Cultivate understanding among us and strengthen us in love and service to our community. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Creator God, you scatter the proud. Everything we have belongs first to you. Bless and protect the seas, mountains, plains, forests, skies, and soils that surround us. Give us humility as we tend them. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Righteous God, you humble the powerful and lift up the lowly. We pray for the leaders of all nations, that they amplify the voices of people in need. Guide all people entrusted with leadership, to create societies in which everyone can flourish. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Compassionate God, you fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty. Nourish those who lack access to adequate food and nutrition. Bless the work of advocates, community organizers, and food pantries. Encourage others to provide for their neighbors in need. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Healing God, you pour out mercy to all who cry out to you. Surround everyone in need of healing in body, mind, or spirit with your tender presence. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: For whom or what else do the people of God pray?

A silence is given so that your prayers may be offered.

A: Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Eternal God, you are faithful to the promises you made to our forebears. We give thanks for the ministry of Katharina von Bora Luther and other ancestors who organized, planned, dreamed, encouraged, and reached out as they served you. We give thanks for the bold leadership of female leaders in our own time. Inspire others with their steadfast witness. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

G: **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

P: Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

G: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Announcements

P: We thank you for joining us for this service. If you would like to hear other services or access the newest edition of *the Quill*, our newsletter, we invite you to go to our website at queenannelutheran.org.

P: Receive now the blessing:

Benediction

A: Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

P: Almighty God, the Father, † the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
bless and preserve you.

G: Amen.

Dismissal

P: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

G: Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Variations on a Swiss carol:
Noël: Il est un petit l'Ange ("Noel: He Is a Little Angel")
Claude Balbastre (1724–1799)

About today's music

Today's organ music transports us the nativity season in the French Baroque era, with two sets of carol variations from francophone countries. Sprightly rhythms and a sense of playfulness are hallmarks of the *organ noel* genre. Today's Hymn of the Day, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus," is sung to the beloved Welsh tune, HYFRYDOL, an alternate for this text found in some hymnals. If you're accustomed to the tune found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (JEFFERSON, a tune from the American South), perhaps consider how this marriage of text and tune brings out different aspects of the text.

– Cantor Kyle Haugen

