

## Sermon (12/19... youth)

*Phoebe*

*Here we are, at the fourth and final Sunday of Advent. Christmas really is coming. It's just around the corner.*

*In fact, the word "Advent" means "coming." We're getting ready to celebrate the coming of God into the world in a unique way. God takes on our humanity. The word for this is "incarnation." The Creator experiences what it's like to be the creation.*

*It's an amazing mystery that God could dwell with us as one of us, but without Jesus we would never experience God as personal.*

*In today's first reading, we are told about the city where it happened:*

*<sup>2</sup>But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,  
who are one of the little clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to rule in Israel,  
whose origin is from of old,  
from ancient days.*

*Bethlehem isn't the city with God's temple. It's not the place where the king's palace is located. It's just a run-of-the-mill, sleepy town.*

*Maybe this is a sign of God's "upside-down" kingdom—for the Son of God to come to humanity in the little town of Bethlehem.*

Grace

*“O Little Town of Bethlehem” was written by an Episcopal priest named Phillips Brooks. It was first sung at a Sunday school Christmas service on December 27, 1865.*

***Please join us to sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” ELW 279.***

Jimmy

*At the introduction to today’s service, Pastor Dan reminded us that the cradle and cross are inextricably connected on the fourth Sunday of Advent.*

*But what’s that all about?*

*We heard about the ancient Jewish system of sacrifices in today’s second reading. Sacrifices reminded God’s people that—by themselves—they weren’t in a right relationship with God.*

*But the sacrifices weren’t complete. They had to be repeated. The system continued for centuries.*

*The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 40. These words sound surprising. Yet they show us that even authors of the Old Testament felt that sacrifices were not enough to make us right with God.*

**<sup>6</sup>Sacrifice and offering you do not desire...**

**Burnt offering and sin offering  
you have not required.**

**<sup>7</sup>Then I said, “Here I am;  
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.**

**<sup>8</sup>I delight to do your will, O my God;  
your law is within my heart.”**

The writer of Hebrews points this psalm to Christ.

*In Christ, God turns the whole idea of sacrifice upside-down. God's Son, born of Mary in the little town of Bethlehem, is an offering "once for all" on the cross—for all people, for all time.*

*The result is restoration, renewal, and reconciliation—with God and with one another. Now we can be at peace with God and make caring for our neighbor our focus. No other work on our part is necessary, including the old system of sacrifices.*

*And so the cradle of Christmas really is linked to the cross... and to the empty tomb of Easter. Both involve sacrifices Jesus made to bring us into right relationship with God and with others.*

*That's why we want to "Go, tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born."*

Grace

*"Go Tell It on the Mountain" comes from an African American spiritual with Christmas words written by John W. Work Jr. in 1925.*

*Work was one of the first and foremost collectors of African American songs and spirituals. He was also a professor, teaching history, Latin and Greek.*

***Please join us to sing "Go, Tell It on the Mountain," ELW 290.***

Phoebe

*Our Gathering Hymn this morning is a modern take on the Song of Mary. As recorded in Luke, Mary's song begins:*

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup>for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed..."*

*Through Mary— a real, living, breathing human being—God comes to humankind. In the baby Jesus, God can completely identify with the human experience.*

*Mary was God's willing servant, and through her consent the Christ-child entered the world. That's why all generations ever since call Mary "blessed."*

*The waiting is almost over. Christmas really is coming. God is coming into the world in the Person of the Christ-child.*

*It's just around the corner.*

Grace

*Our next carol describes the Christ-child as sweet-smelling rose blooming in the middle of the wintertime.*

*The words also remind us of Isaiah's prophecy that the Messiah would be descended from the kings of Israel, through the line of Jesse, King David's father.*

***Please join us to sing "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming," ELW 272.***