

Gospel lesson

This reading goes back earlier in the Gospel of Luke from where we left off last week, to immediately after Mary learned she would bear the Son of God:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/mary-elizabeth/>;
credit: LUMO

Luke 1:39-45

(NRSV)

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country,

⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit

⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?

⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.

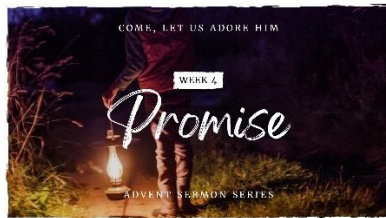
⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

The word of God for the people of God

<Children's program>

<Hymn "Angels from the Realms of Glory" UMH #220>

Message: Promise



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-let-us-adore-him/fourth-sunday-of-advent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/fourth-sunday-of-advent-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Gracious God, we know your promises are trustworthy.

As we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may remember in our times of fear and worry that you've got us – and will enable us with Your love to better life in Your kingdom. Amen.

We continue our Advent series today with "Promise":

"On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, we receive promise with the hope of fruition—not hope as a wish but hope actively moving toward fulfillment."



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/100-us-dollar-banknotes-3483098/>;
credit: John Guccione
www.advergroup.com

If I offered you ten million dollars today on the condition that tomorrow you were done, that was it, you were dead, would you take it? <Let them respond>

If waking up each day is worth more than ten million dollars to you, how are you spending each of them? Do you give thanks to God each day when you wake up?

What if I offered it on the condition that your beloved healthy child or grandchild was done tomorrow? Would you take the money then? Why/why not? <Let them respond>

If waking up each day with them in your life is worth more than ten million dollars to you, how do you express that to them? And when was the last time that you tried to let them know that? <Let them respond>

Far too often people fail to express the love they have for others, and even alienate those they love most. All through history they have done so, even despite good intentions. We heard Micah in the Old Testament prophesy that a new king would be born, who would secure peace for the people. In Luke, we hear that Mary was to bear that Messiah. What did her family do with her when they heard the news that she was pregnant? <Let them respond>



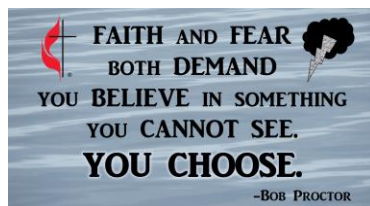
picture screencaptured from
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INgCwqWgUik>;
credit: LUMO

They sent her off to the hill country! Was she an

embarrassment to them, or did they somehow blame Elizabeth and Zechariah for putting ideas into her head about God giving her a child as a special blessing? Mary trusted God; did her parents?

Do we?

I have heard quite a few people express fear about where the country is headed since the election. To hear some on the internet describe it, our democracy is teetering on the brink of downfall – and maybe it is, who knows?



background picture from MMMS collection

But we do have a choice of how we respond. As Bob Proctor said, “Faith and fear both demand you believe in something you cannot see; you choose.” Do we get caught up in fear and worry, frozen into inaction and unable to live fully, or do we trust the promise given us by Lord of life, to provide for us so that we may live in hope, love, and joy?

True, it may not look like what you thought you wanted – but when we trust in God, we typically find out what we are blessed with is much greater than we had initially imagined.

It is easy to get comfortable doing what we always have, and to expect others to do similarly; we may even get annoyed or judgmental if they do not. The Israelites had grown accustomed to doing sacrifices

and burnt offerings, but Jesus taught a new way to worship the Lord – a giving of one’s self to do God’s will, for us to be the body of Christ.

I am pretty sure that God would not be pleased if, in insisting upon on traditional strict worship behavior, we drive others away from church with negative judgments about their expressions of faith. Rather, just as Jesus has accommodated us with love, we need to seek ways of inviting others to experience the love of the Lord with us – especially when prone to fear about life in general. God calls us to faith.

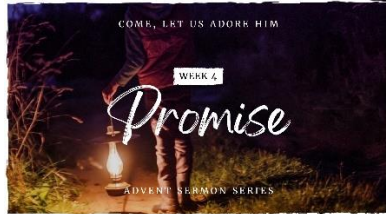


picture from personal creation

I just completed a term paper about regionalization in the UMC: what was endorsed at the worldwide General Conference meeting and what those changes might look like once implemented. For us locally, we likely will not notice any difference. For the larger church, much of it has to do with relinquishing US control over the details of how Methodism is implemented in foreign cultures because our systems for doing things do not work well overseas.

Objections to regionalization seem to be based in fear of breaking with tradition and the way things are done currently. I believe that regionalization is healthier for the UMC than the US-centric polity that has been in place since the Methodist church’s

inception. Regionalization embraces diversity and enables more effective sharing of the Christian message within non-US cultures.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-let-us-adore-him/fourth-sunday-of-advent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/fourth-sunday-of-advent-year-c-graphics>

Moving forward in that direction shows trust in God's promise to bless us. The UMC does not need to be frozen in dismay that disaffiliations happened; God will restore the church through the faithful.

Similarly, we in this local community can trust in God's promise, whatever the turmoil this society brings to our daily lives. We can choose to show love, to be kind, to share joy and hope in Jesus.

We can work on building stronger community relationships that others may see evidence of God's kingdom on this earth. We can trust in God's promise, work for its fruition, and celebrate in joy the blessings we receive in the Lord.