



The Fourth Sunday of Advent  
This Will Be a Sign: #MoreLove

## **Prelude**

*Angel Carols*, Martha Main and Judy Prosch

**Gathering**— The sky was brighter than usual that night, making it easier to keep track of the sheep. And then it got *really* bright. You would have thought that all that “glory” shining would have been “the sign.” That’s what most of us look for—great big obvious clues about God’s presence. But instead, the angel says that a baby... a newborn helpless baby in a feeding trough was it—God’s sign that more love is possible for all of us.

## **We Light Our Advent Wreath**

There are angels among us that may not meet the eye. There are messages of love coming from a choir on high, but don’t just look up; for the way God works is to plant more love right here on earth just like it was with Jesus’ birth.

Today, as we light this candle of love, we commit our lives this Advent to bringing more love to this hurting world. With this light we proclaim the message of the angels, “Do Not Be Afraid.”

**Advent Wreath Prayer**—Holy Living God, Blessed Jesus, Guiding Spirit, alight within us your flame of love this day. Grant us openness to hear your message. Grant us courage to be your messengers in the world, creating more love in the midst of fear. Amen.

**A Time of Prayer**—Holy God, in this moment we give thanks for all the ways we experience your presence among us, including in our worship. We give thanks that you offer words and actions that bring joy in the midst of sorrow. Today we pray for all those who are longing for signs of joy, and we pray that you might guide us to opportunities where we can be messengers of your joy...

**The Lord's Prayer** (unison)—Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us

this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

**We Hear God's Word**                      *Luke 2:1-20 (adapted from The Voice Translation)*

**Narrator:** Around the time of Elizabeth's amazing pregnancy and John's birth, the emperor in Rome, Caesar Augustus, required everyone in the Roman Empire to participate in a massive census—the first census since Quirinius had become governor of Syria. Each person had to go to his or her ancestral city to be counted.

Mary's fiancé Joseph, from Nazareth in Galilee, had to participate in the census in the same way everyone else did. Because he was a descendant of King David, his ancestral city was Bethlehem, David's birthplace.

Mary, who was now late in her pregnancy that the messenger Gabriel had predicted, accompanied Joseph. While in Bethlehem, she went into labor and gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped the baby in a blanket and laid Him in a feeding trough because the inn had no room for them.

Nearby, in the fields outside of Bethlehem, a group of shepherds were guarding their flocks from predators in the darkness of night. Suddenly a messenger of the Lord stood in front of them, and the darkness was replaced by a glorious light—the shining light of God's glory. They were terrified!

**Messenger:** Don't be afraid! Listen! I bring good news, news of great joy, news that will affect all people everywhere. Today, in the city of David, a Liberator has been born for you! He is the promised Anointed One, the Supreme Authority! This will be a sign for you—you will know you have found Him when you see a baby, wrapped in a blanket, lying in a feeding trough.

**The Shepherds:** *REALLY!!!? THAT'S the sign?*

**Narrator:** At that moment, the first heavenly messenger was joined by thousands of other messengers—a vast heavenly choir. They praised God proclaiming: "To the highest heights of the universe, glory to God! And on earth, peace among all people who bring pleasure to God!"

At that moment, the first heavenly messenger was joined by thousands of other messengers—a vast heavenly choir. They praised God proclaiming:

**Messenger:** "To the highest heights of the universe, glory to God! And on earth, peace among all people who bring pleasure to God!"

**Narrator:** As soon as the heavenly messengers disappeared into heaven, the shepherds were buzzing with conversation.

**The Shepherds:** Let's rush down to Bethlehem right now! Let's see what's happening! Let's experience what the Lord has told us about!

**Narrator:** So they ran into town, and *eventually* they found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the feeding trough. After they saw the baby, they spread the story of *what they had experienced and* what had been said to them about this child. Everyone who heard their story couldn't stop thinking about its meaning. Mary, too, pondered all of these events, treasuring each memory in her heart.

The shepherds returned *to their flocks*, praising God for all they had seen and heard, and they glorified God for the way the experience had unfolded just as the heavenly messenger had predicted.

### Scripture Song

*Surely the Presence*, #131

*Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place  
I can feel God's mighty power and God's grace.  
I can hear the brush of angel's wings,  
I see glory on each face;  
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.*

### Meditation

*#MoreLove*

### Hymn

*O Come, All Ye Faithful*, #182

### We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving

**Invitation**—In Jesus Christ, we received the greatest gift of God's love born into this world, into our lives, into our hearts. In response to that holiest, most sacred gift, we bring our gifts that God might use them to plant more love right here on earth.

**December Benevolence**—Christmas Fund

### Doxology

**We Give Thanks**—God of boundless love, we offer these gifts so that they may be transformed into your good news for the sake of the world. Amen.

### Hymn

*The First Noel*, #229

**Benediction**—As you go forth into the world this week, find ways to carry the message of joy to those you meet. Carry in your hearts the message the angels proclaimed: Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid! Amen.

**Postlude**

*Festive March*