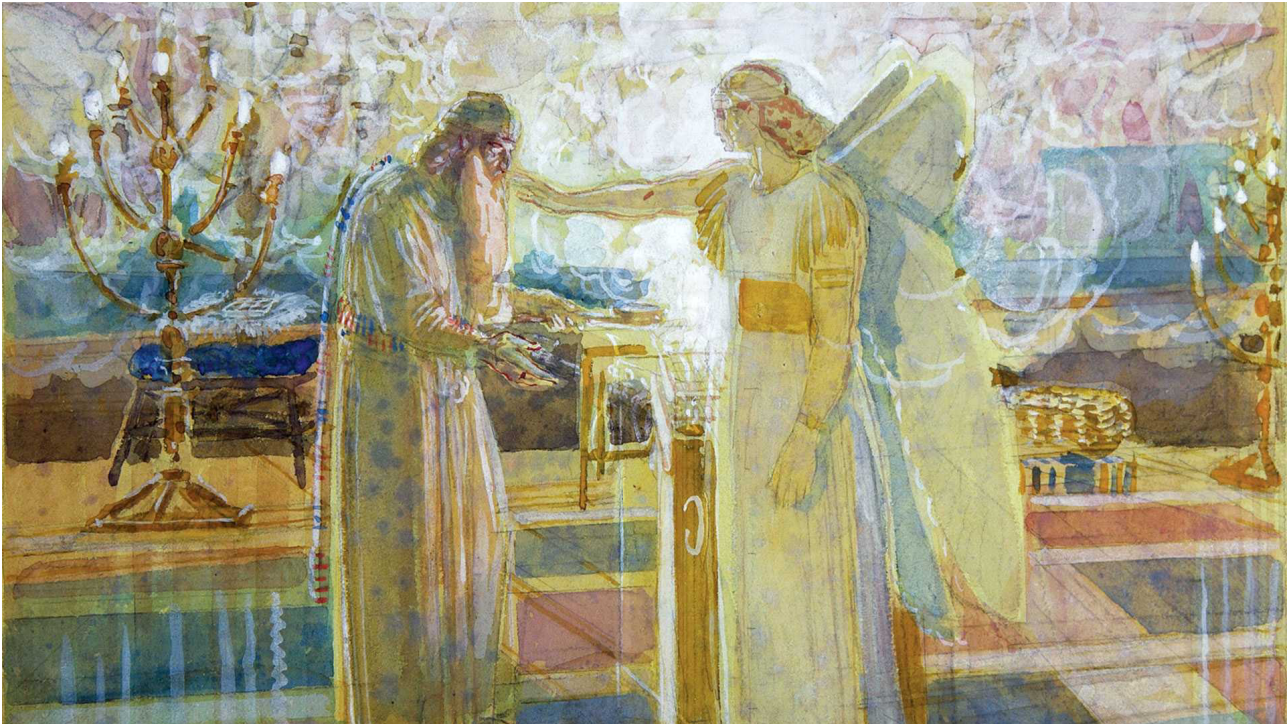


Sermon by Stephanie Gotze

Sunday 28 November

Advent 1, Year C, 2021



What was the last decision you made? This morning, we are starting off with a simple-sounding question, that may not be so simple after all. If we consider carefully when it was that we made our most recent decision, we run into the problem of what to count among active decisions. Do we include the choices that we make every day, such as what to eat for lunch? Would we consider only those choices that have made a significant impact on our lives? What about those choices that we don't really consider choices, because we choose the same thing every time, and we hardly think of it as a choice? Our simple question becomes much more complex quite quickly.

Our Psalm this morning is a meditation on the deep desire to be engaged and formed by the guidance of God by acknowledging our dependence on him. The psalmist pleads with God for wisdom and guidance. In the psalmist's choices, like in our own, there is confusion, and he is looking for guidance. The psalmist confesses his faith in God, cries out to God in his affliction, and is cared for by God.

Despite being full of emotions, the psalmist places his emotions under what he believed about God. His difficulties are many, but he elevated his beliefs about God over his difficult feelings about his situation. He mentions feeling guilty about past sins, fear about his enemies, and plenty of confusion about his next move in life. But despite all of this, he declares the steadfast love and mercy of God, and his salvation, truthfulness, uprightness and goodness. His circumstances do not diminish his view of the truth about God's character, and only promote his declaring of it more and more.

The psalmist cried out to God for guidance. God shows the psalmist what his guidance can be like. The psalmist learns that acknowledging his sinfulness is no obstacle to guidance, and in fact, having humility is an important part of having a heart receptive to God's guidance. Trusting and having faith in God are also essential components of having a heart ready to receive guidance.

This Advent, this way of guidance from God offers us a distinctive opportunity. The psalm is an honest call. It calls out to us “humble yourself, and trust God,” because ‘all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness.’

This Advent also is a reminder of us of the things to come. We expect with hope the redemption of our broken world. We read this morning that we wait with faith for the redemption of the world. This is to acknowledge that there is a purpose in the waiting, even when it feels uncomfortable. Despite the discomfort, we are offered the opportunity to dive in a little bit deeper, to wait ever more expectantly for the fulfillment of the promises of Christ. “I will fulfil my promise,” declares the Lord in our Old Testament reading. We never wait without confidence in our God, because, “the Lord is our righteousness.”

Welcome to Advent. Welcome to the expectant waiting for Christ the King to appear. Welcome to the preparation for Christ’s past coming into the world, his presence among us and his coming into our hearts, and for his coming again in glory.

The Kingdom of God is so very near. It is as near as our breath. It is as near as the bread and the wine is. It is as near as the water of our baptism. It is as near as our gathering. It is near to us in our hearts as we worship. Although we wait expectantly for Christ’s coming again, we

celebrate with confidence that Christ already became near to us. We are preparing our hearts now to welcome Christ afresh and anew.

The Kingdom of God is future, and the Kingdom of God is also here and now. Preparing our hearts for Christ again this Advent means affirming that this Jesus of Nazareth, who, being God, took on flesh and dwelt among us. It means acknowledging his life as being without sin, in perfect keeping with the law. It means knowing in Christ's death upon the cross is the once-for-all sacrifice for sin, and is effective for us by our faith in him.

What a joy, what a challenge, and what an opportunity for our Advent observance. This would really be a decision with a difference. How would it be to continually put our trust in God? What would this transform in us?

“Be on your guard,” the Lord Jesus instructs us, in no uncertain terms at all. “Be alert,” he tells us. “Stand up, and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Our redemption is upon us in Christ. Prepare your hearts for him. Christ's word and promise to his people is the only thing that “will not pass away.” Trust in Christ today more fully. Be more alert to the opportunities you have to be guided by God.

And be on guard, because the walk following Christ is not easy. Here we are, on the road to Bethlehem's hope. Soon enough, our way will be lit by the light of the guiding star in the sky. But beyond the humble glory of the manger lies the rugged hill of Calvary. Some time after the advent of the holy child, Jesus, the infant King, we meet our suffering Saviour, Christ, the lamb who was slain. We must follow him all the way there. We must make it to the crib, and to the cross. That is all of Christ, for all of life, for all of the world.

So, we prepare our hearts now for the advent of Christ.

'Keep us awake and alert, watching for your kingdom,
and make us strong in faith,
so that when Christ comes in glory to judge the earth,
we may go out joyfully to greet him...'