

# Advent 2011 Week 4

Obviously it's the fourth week of Advent, and we'll spend just a few moments with today's Advent scripture before we return to our remembrances of Common Ground.

In the first chapter of Luke's Gospel we find these words . . .

## Luke 1:26-29 (NLT)

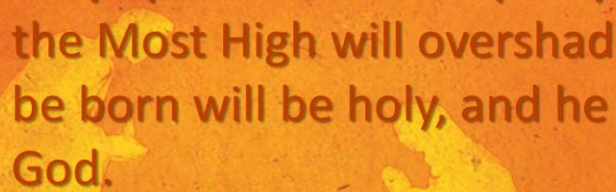
<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. <sup>28</sup>Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup>Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

## Luke 1:30-33 (NLT)

<sup>30</sup>“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! <sup>31</sup>You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

## Luke 1:34-35 (NLT)

<sup>34</sup>Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." <sup>35</sup>The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.



## Luke 1:36-38 (NLT)

<sup>36</sup>What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she's now in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup>For nothing is impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

What a day that must have been for Mary. God stepped into her life through the angel Gabriel, and brought her strange and wonderful news. She would become pregnant though she was a virgin. She would be pregnant although she wasn't married. Those probably would have seemed like bad circumstances for Mary, but the angel said Mary had found favor with God. She might have thought: If this is what favor with God brings me, I don't know if I want it.

Her life would become incredibly difficult and awkward, but according to the angel this would be a good thing . . .

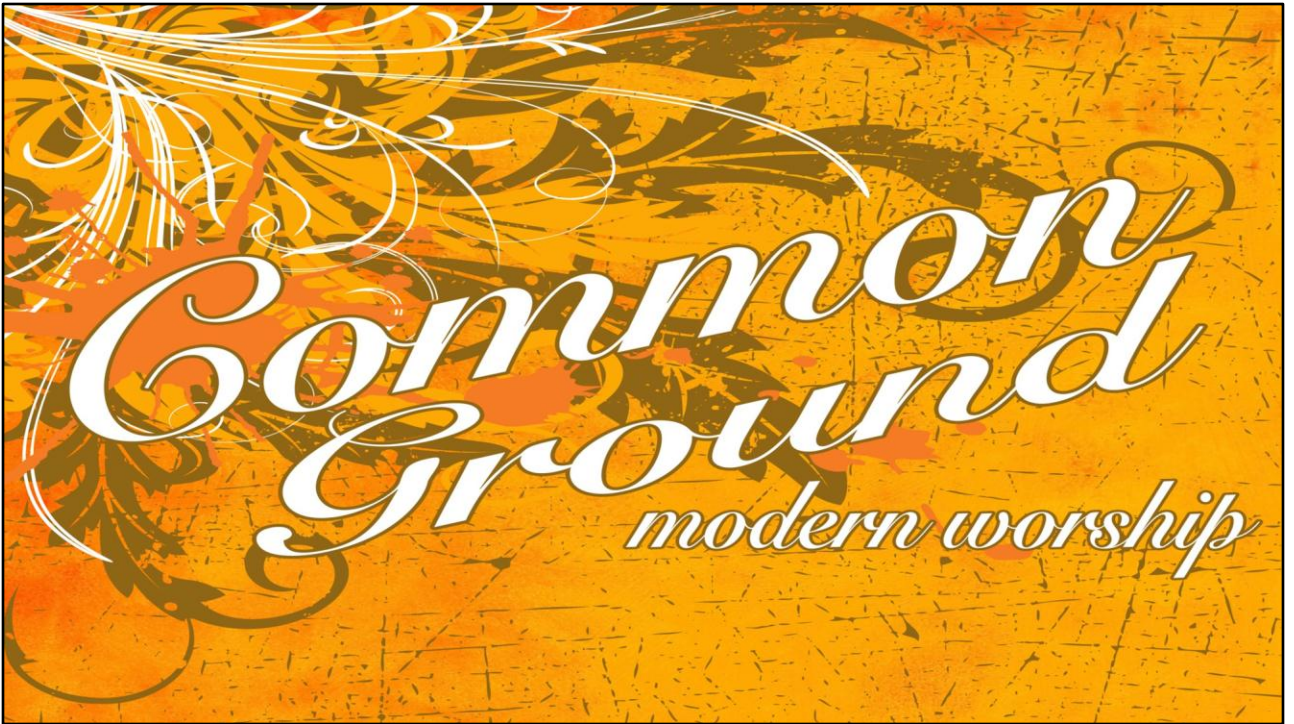
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. . . She would give birth to the Son of God. God would come to live with humanity as one of us, and Mary would be the child's mother. She would give birth to and raise the Son of God. How could that be? How would she respond?

Her response was: I am the Lord's servant. May it come to pass. I hope that you and I can respond with just as much faith when we are called to mission for God, even if it seems strange or difficult, and even if it takes us far out of our comfort zones. Because we are called to a life of faith.

It was out of just such a calling that many of us created this worship service . . .



. . . that we called Common Ground over eight years ago. Our purpose was to create a worship service where everyone would feel welcome. It would be as if we placed a sign out front that said: Everyone welcome, no exceptions. We wanted to create an atmosphere and a fellowship where we could join together in passionate and genuine worship. We wanted a service where we could connect with God and each other and be challenged to take God's kingdom mission back into our community and beyond. And I think we did that.

Our theme verse (or passage) has been from Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he said. . .

## 1 Corinthians 9:19-20

<sup>19</sup>Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. <sup>20</sup>When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law.

## 1 Corinthians 9:21-23

<sup>21</sup>When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. <sup>22</sup>When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find **common ground** with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. <sup>23</sup>I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

It's a worthy way to live—adapting to our cultural surroundings enough that we can speak people's different languages, appreciate their music, dine with them, and become friends and eventually share our faith. And I hope that as the Common Ground worship service comes to an end you will do us a very high honor by adopting this philosophy as your way of life.

If you've been at least halfway awake during these years of services you've probably also realized a couple of other theme passages. One comes from Matthew's Gospel account where Jesus says . . .

## Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT)

<sup>37</sup>“You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’  
<sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment.  
<sup>39</sup>A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

Both Pastor Dave and I have preached on this passage numerous times in this service, and I think it encapsulates not just the law and the prophets but Jesus’ message for us. If we will love God with our whole being and love our neighbors as ourselves, we will truly be living as Jesus intended and the world will be able to look at us and testify that we are Christians because of the love we have for one another and for those outside the walls of the church and for those in need.

And that brings me to the last theme scripture from Micah 6 . . .

## Micah 6:6-8 (NRSV)

<sup>6</sup> “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” <sup>8</sup> He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Every time I read it, this scripture hits me straight between the eyes. What kind of worship does God require of me and of you. It is to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. This is the kind life we have encouraged each other to live. And we’ve demonstrated it in our mission trips, in our food drives, in our service projects, and in the way we’ve treated each other and treated every new person who has walked through those doors.

This has been a place and a fellowship of genuine Christian community, and I hope each of us will continue to live the kind of lives we have encouraged each other to live here. And as we continue to think on those scriptures and those thoughts . . .



. . . I want to invite you to a time of contemplation. You should have received in your worship bulletin a blank piece of paper. I invite you to take out that piece of paper and consider writing a prayer or some of your thoughts on the events of this last week and the last several months that have brought us to this point—the final Common Ground service. Some of us have hurt, anger, resentment, bitterness and just a whole range of emotions. During this time of prayer and contemplation I invite you to write down those thoughts or prayers and bring them to the cross. This will be an act of worship in which we will be able to express our thoughts to God and hand the burdens over to God. And as we do this we can be sure that God understands our hurt, frustrations and anger. Jesus felt all of those things and weeps with us today in our experience.