# The Days Are Surely Coming

*A service for the first Sunday of Advent, year C, and Disabilities Awareness Day.*

## Gathering

Call to Worship

 The days are coming:

 **When God’s promises are fulfilled.**

The days are coming:

 **When God leads us on paths of righteousness.**

The days are surely coming:

 **When the kingdom of God draws near.**

Let us worship our God of possibilities and hope.

 God be with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn VU 1, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (v. 1–2)

Prayer

**Holy and Eternal God,**

**As we await the coming of our Messiah,**

**for you to enter our lives and our world,**

**may our hopes for your coming kingdom echo your hopes.**

**Challenge us to recognize your paths for us.**

**Let us grow expectantly in community,
as we make the pilgrimage to the manger once again**

**to witness your ways and your grace in the world.**

**In Jesus’ name, we pray.**

**Amen.**

Comforting Words / Assurance of Grace

The good news is that, in the coming of Jesus, God dares a new world where our expectations of power are transformed, where the dignity, beauty, and call of all is witnessed, and where God’s love for us is never-ending. Thanks be to God.

Gloria (sung)

Peace Share with your neighbours saying, “The peace of Christ.”

## Word

Advent Wreath

1: We light this first candle, beginning with hope—the hope that God holds
for a new world.

2: God’s gift of hope, that persists to bring forth life.

1: God’s gift of hope, that protests the way the priorities of the world discounts people.

2: God’s gift of hope that names all as beloved and beautiful children,
that comes to be with us.

*(The first candle is lit in silence)*

Hymn VU 7, “Hope Is a Star” (v. 1)

Hebrew Scripture Jeremiah 33:14–16
Gospel Lesson Luke 21:25–36

Sermon: The Protest of Incarnation

The days are surely coming. People will faint, the sea will roar, the powers of heaven will be shaken. When we begin the season of Advent—the season of waiting for Jesus to be born in our lives and our world again—we always face these grand apocalyptic texts setting us up with high hopes and expectations. But do these texts prepare us for the entrance of God as a baby?

I invite you to consider our hopes and expectations versus God’s hopes and expectations—where do they align and where might we step back and adjust? In one of my favourite movies, *The Family Stone*, a family gathers for Christmas with the addition of one son’s soon-to-be fiancée. Let’s just say she struggles to fit in and to understand the dynamics of this particular family. At Christmas dinner, she hesitates when speaking with the brother, who is deaf, but is reminded that Thad reads lips. Discussing the hopes of the gay couple adopting a baby, she asks if the couple believes in nurture vs nature in regard to sexual orientation (“the gay thing”). The mother laughs as she said, “I did desperately hope that you would all be gay.” The woman responds, “I just don’t think any parent would hope for a child to be challenged like that...life is hard enough as it is.” The film continues, reconciliation comes, and it ends with a family loving each other, but this scene always captures me and reminds us how our hopes and expectations can overshadow God’s hopes and expectations—that all are seen and treated as God’s beautiful and beloved children.

Mary had great expectations of her baby. After all, look at her song of praise where through God Jesus will bring down the mighty, fill the hungry, and help God’s servant Israel. And so did the people, like us, who were waiting for him, wondering when and how God would reach out to them. The Messiah, coming to be with us, must be greater than we can even imagine. Expectations are high.

Nowadays, parents still hold expectations of their soon-to-be newborns, whether consciously or not. There can be some ableism and privilege mixed in: “I hope my child is healthy … has ten fingers and ten toes,” or as the character said, “I just don’t think any parent would hope for a child to be challenged like that.” If and when a child is born with a disability, as I was, there tends to be a time of grief—grieving the expectations of what life may be like and worrying what life might hold for this child who is different, the challenges I would face. As I grew, society’s expectations of me seemed either low or placed me on a pedestal because of the “challenges I overcame.” Our worries and hopes become centred around how the world works and what the world expects versus how God works and what God expects.

The world may have expected God to enter the world as a strong, independent adult, perhaps with a noble or powerful background. And yet, as we all know now, God chose to enter our world as a baby, born to a young virgin, without a husband. A baby with needs, a baby that had to be cared for, a baby that knew all about interdependence and vulnerability. God came as that still, small voice, or rather as a tiny crying newborn. The protest of incarnation—dismantling worldly powers and expectations. God chose to enter our world with divine love and human limits.

Michelle Voss Roberts writes: “Divinity must become limited if anything is to happen. Christians affirm these limitations in God in a special way in the incarnation: divinity took flesh for a period of approximately thirty years in first-century Palestine. Jesus experienced infancy, childhood, youth, and adulthood. He changed. He died. He knew what it was possible to know from the perspective of a working-class Jew in a small corner of the Roman Empire. God was uniquely present to, and experienced the limits of, that slice of history and geography.” (*Body Parts: A Theological Anthropology*, 2017, p. 65)

The beauty and the protest of the incarnation is that God flips worldly powers, hopes, and expectations on its head. Jesus, limited as human and wholly divine, came to be present, to be in solidarity with us—with our struggles and joys as people of God. And so, as we enter this season, when the days are surely coming when God is revealed to the world once again, how do we participate in the protest of incarnation by living out God’s hopes and expectations people and for the world? How do we celebrate the beauty and diversity of all peoples, created by God, limited to this time and place—the beauty of incarnation within us and our churches? The days are surely coming.

Hymn VU 8, “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming”

Offering

Call: Let us bring our gifts, our hopes for God’s new world, in service and love.

Blessing: Bless these gifts, O God, that they may help prepare the way to the manger,
to your entering our world with justice and humility.

Prayers of the People

Our prayers today have a sung response. We will begin with that.

**VU 22, “Wait for the Lord”**

We give you thanks, Loving God, for the gifts of this day and this season:

For the changing of calendars, for the start of a new year

For the lengthening of nights, for the warmth amidst the cold

For the refocusing on your hopes and expectations for us and for the world

And most of all, we thank you, for coming in the vulnerable yet hope-filled gift of Jesus Christ.

Help us keep alert to your hope as we wait.

**VU 22, “Wait for the Lord”**

We pray for our world, for the brokenness and beauty of your creation:

For the blooming of a rose, the blossoming of the earth hidden amidst the winter

For the partners calling us to pay attention to climate change, to care for the integrity of creation

For the people marked as “other” by principalities, by what the world expects

For the people and places today who hold onto your hope

amidst the fear and violence that surrounds them.

Help us keep alert to your hope as we wait.

**VU 22, “Wait for the Lord”**

We pray for our church, as we seek to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ:

For congregations daring to enter a new year with hope

For partners and friends in other contexts, and other denominations,

who accompany us and ask us to accompany them

For us as we live into your hope for us in this time and this place

For your gift of the Spirit leading us once again to the manger together.

Help us keep alert to your hope as we wait.

**VU 22, “Wait for the Lord”**

We pray for those sick and suffering, in body, in mind, and in spirit:

For people discounted by the world’s expectations

For folks with heavy hearts of grief and sadness

For families that are struggling to make ends meet this season

For those we name in our hearts …

And for those you only know the names of …

Help us keep alert to your hope as we wait.

**VU 22, “Wait for the Lord”**

Hopeful, persistent, and protesting God,

Lead us into this season to uncover your hope

Lead us into this season to discover your kingdom-on-earth anew

Lead us into this season to welcome our vulnerable, beautiful, and holy Messiah, Jesus Christ.

It is in his name we pray, saying, **Our Father…**

Lord’s Prayer

## Sending Forth

Hymn VU 9, “People Look East” (v. 1)

Commissioning

Let us go out into the world

with our hearts full of God’s hope,

as we keep alert for Jesus entering our world anew.

Blessing

May the God who leads us to new hopes,

Jesus who comes to make a new world with us,

And the Holy Spirit who nudges on to the protest of the manger,

Be with us today, this week, this season, and evermore. Amen.

Postlude

*—Miriam Spies works with the Christian Reformed Church in North America as the
Volunteer and Communications Specialist for Disability Concerns and Safe Church,
focusing on disability advocacy, abuse policies, and creating safe spaces.
She is also a member of the World Council of Churches’ Central Committee.
Miriam recently served as the Families and Young Adults Minister
at St. Paul’s United Church, Dundas, ON. She lives with cerebral palsy.*