

Sermon "Our Precarious Pregnancy"
Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 21, 2025
Rev. John Balicki
St. Luke's Church, Wilton, Maine

Advent: the time to listen for footsteps – you can't hear footsteps when you're running yourself.
– Bill McKibben.

Winter solstice has always been special to me as a barren darkness that gives birth to a verdant future beyond imagination." - Gary Zukav

This is the solstice, the still point of the sun, its cusp and midnight, the year's threshold and unlocking, where the past lets go and becomes the future; - Margaret Atwood

Every year the season of Advent and the Winter Solstice intersect. But only occasionally on a Sunday, the last being Dec. 22, 2019. Remember what you were doing? The solstice is actually set for 10:03 AM today, only ? minutes away – and if you feel the strong urge to go out at that time and witness it, then go outside. But it's not too dramatic. Between 10:02 and 10:04 you won't notice anything much different. But our ancient ancestors who were more keen observers of the sky could detect it.

Today the sun seems to have halted in it's long southerly journey. It seems to have paused, deciding whether to move away from earth, lessening its light. It is as if it were contemplating a headlong plunge outward into darkness. The prospect of such a decision terrified our ancient ancestors which gave birth to one of the primal holy days of the night of the winter solstice where they built fires on hilltops and holy places. And that blended into our Advent customs as Gertrud Mueller Nelson describes in her book, "To Dance with God":

Ancient peoples who lived in the far north and who suffered the archetypal loss of life and light with the disappearance of the sun had a way of wooing back life and hope. These people did not separate the natural phenomenon from their religious or mystical yearning, so nature and mystery remained combined. As the days grew shorter and colder and the sun threatened to abandon the earth, these ancient people suffered the sort of guilt and separation anxiety which we also know. Their solution was to bring all ordinary action and daily routine to a halt. They gave in to the nature of winter, came away from their carts and wagons, festooned them with greens and lights, and brought them indoors as a sign of a different time, a time to stop and turn inward. They engaged the feelings of cold and fear and loss. Slowly, slowly they wooed the sun-god back. And light followed darkness. Morning came earlier.

This kind of success – hauling the very sun back: the recovery of hope- can only be accomplished when we have the courage to stop and wait and engage fully in the winter of our dark longing. Perhaps the symbolic energy of those wheels made sacred has escaped us and we wish to relegate our Advent wreaths to the realm of quaint custom or pretty decoration. Imagine what would happen if we were to understand that ancient prescription for this season literally and remove - just one- say the right front tire from our automobiles and use this for our Advent wreath. Indeed, things would stop. Our daily routines would come to a halt and we would have the leisure to incubate. We could attend to our precarious pregnancy and look after ourselves. Having to stay put, we would lose the opportunity to escape or deny our feelings or becomings because our cars could not bring us away to the circus in town.

Now I predict with high probability that Gertrud's suggestion to remove that right front tire from each of our cars would not be greeted with a lot of enthusiasm. First of course the Church Insurance Company would forbid the encouragement of seniors messing with jacks and tire irons in the parking lot in cold weather. And many of you just not able. And others would say, "I need my car to get the heck out of here. I've got a lot of things to do!" So I took the liberty to hire some strong, yet unemployed, young men with jacks and tire irons to take your right front tires off for you and you'll find them next to your cars when you leave. . . .

Just kidding,or am I? Well let's go there figuratively, if not literally.

There have been requests for a picture of the Nativity on our bulletin or more hymns concerning Mary and those are never bad suggestions but not this year. You see in this tumultuous year of 2025, a year which will go down in infamy in our nation's history long into the future, I am much less concerned with Mary's pregnancy and much more concerned with our own precarious pregnancy. What are we needing to, trying to give birth to? As individuals, as a nation, as a church?

So of our choices from the lectionary today, the one that speaks the most to me this Sunday is the portion of Psalm 80 that we recited together. Psalm 80 is classified as a corporate lament. We don't know the situation that precipitated the lament but we know that it's not trivial. God has fed the people with the bread of tears, given them bowls of tears to drink, we have been made the derision of our neighbors, yes perhaps even our neighbors here in Franklin County, and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

Now lament is never an easy sentiment, much less in this season when we are supposed to be indefatigably cheery. But to cry, to lament, this Christmas season might not only be a faithful response to the reality of our lives, to the sorrowful things our lives hold, it

might also be a way of entering into God's way of entering into life with us. Our psalmist today made this plea, "Show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved".

This is God's promised photosynthesis at the solstice. When God's face shines, we are saved. God is organically and essentially with us (as per our testimony about the Incarnation!). When God's face shines, there is power to bring to life to that which has been trampled. And as Psalm 80 testifies, God's power is sovereign, no quid pro quo; God alone acts. God shines **and** God empowers and directs the chemistry in us that produces lifeblood from God's light and food.

I hope and pray that during this day of solstice, a Sunday when we always remember the resurrection, that we will find some time to slow down and ponder our own precarious pregnancies. What is God empowering in us? What kind of lifeblood can we produce?

I leave you with the Muslim poet, Rumi who said,

Don't think the garden loses its ecstasy in winter. It's quiet down there, but the roots are riotous."