

Dare to Imagine God's Embrace Embracing God's Child Jesus, Leads to Peace

Scriptures: Luke 1:68-79; 3:1-6; Malachi 3:1-4; Phil. 1:3-11

Focus statement: Imagine the wideness of God's *embrace* of all creatures and creation! It will widen our hearts to do the things that make for *peace*.

Sermon Prompts

The traditional theme for this second Sunday of Advent is *peace*. What are some other ways of describing this oft-used word: perhaps "harmony," "wholeness," "restoration," "shalom," or even "God's all-encompassing embrace."

Zechariah's song in Luke 1 describes this divine *embrace* this way: "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (v. 78).

How does the hoped-for shalom described here connect with longings within your congregation or your community?

Malachi 3 reminds us that God's *embrace* requires repentance, a turning from our ways of harm and a turning to the God whose way is love.

Luke 3 continues in this vein, describing John the Baptist's message of "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" and his call to make paths straight, to fill valleys, to bring down mountains, to make the crooked straight and the rough places smooth. When we turn from our ways of harm, we realize this promise: "All flesh shall see the salvation of God" (v. 6). What are some ways of harm present in your congregation and community, that need repentance before you can experience the full *embrace* of God?

Philippians 1 is brimming with "*embrace*" imagery. There's Paul's love for the Philippians and their love for him. There's the reference to Jesus' compassion. Then there's the prayer for a love that overflows with wisdom and leads to righteousness. Consider celebrating the love that is present among your congregants, how "Jesus' compassion" is evident among you, and praying this Philippians prayer over our congregation.

We Dared to Imagine . . . by Kathy Giesbrecht

In the middle of a Canadian prairie winter,
sitting each in our own space, separated.
Bound together by our threads of hope and longing,
we placed ourselves in the ancient texts and waited.
Would the incarnate God come and sing over us?
Could we sing . . . Joy to the World?
Slowing, but surely, the Spirit showed herself;
comforting, wooing, assuring, revealing.
The Word came to life, living among us.
Steadfast love began to hold us, strong winds of righteousness
and glory began to blow over us.
The Lord, our God, was in our midst, a glimmer had arrived.
Only now could we free our lament and speak of our struggle.
Seeing the salvation of God, our despair could enter the light of
day.
Cracked open by tender mercy, the eyes of our hearts and minds
caught a glimpse of what might be, what will be.
We dared to imagine.
The faces of John, Mary, and the boy Samuel urging us on,
we opened ourselves to holy possibilities.
Images, words, prayers, and even songs rose over us, among us.
We received them. We recorded them. We slept with them.
We shared them. We invited others to speak into them. We gave
thanks to God.
We now offer them to you, our siblings in faith.
May the Spirit of the living God free you to imagine.