<u>Links for Recording of Last Sunday's Worship Service, 11-29-2020, and Upcoming 12-6-2020 Service at the end of the News Flash</u>

Dear members and friends of Idylwood Presbyterian Church,

I hope everyone has had a wonderful Thanksgiving and has shared some time, even if virtually with family and friends.

This coming Sunday, we have a real treat in store for us. **Dr. Blair Alexander** will be our guest preacher. It will also be the first Sunday of the month, and therefore a **communion Sunday**, so don't forget to come prepared with some juice or wine and a cracker or piece of bread.

The Reverend Dr. Blair Alexander Sr.

Blair Alexander Sr. is on the ministerial staff at the Argonne Hills Gospel Service Chapel at Ft Meade, Maryland where he leads the outreach and in-reach ministries to active duty, retired military members and their families, and the surrounding community in the Ft Meade and Anne Arundel County, Maryland areas. In addition to his outreach and in-reach responsibilities, he served as the past president of the Gospel Service's Parish Council group for 15 years directing the chapel's ministry leaders in developing religious programs that impact the congregation and community. He is a member of the Anne Arundel County Adult Public Guardianship Review Board ensuring medical and housing facilities are provided to our aging and disabled populations. Before joining the Argonne Hills Chapel ministry staff, he spent 21 years in the Army on active duty retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting from Saint Augustine's University in Raleigh N.C., a Master of Business Administration degree from The American University in Washington D.C., a Master of Divinity degree from the Howard University School of Divinity in Washington D.C. and a Doctor of Ministry Degree with an emphasis in Biblical studies, also from the Howard University School of Divinity. He is married to the love of his life, Shelia and together they reside in Edgewater, Maryland. They have one adult son, Blair Jr.

Dr. Blair's text for this Sunday's sermon is **Isaiah 41:10** and the title is: "The Certainty of God during Uncertain Times."

It's not too late to send your contribution for the **HomeShare** project. Please mail checks to the church with a note in the memo line. We are trying to raise \$400, which we will use to buy gift cards for two families.

Also, it may not be too late to buy a Christmas tree, wreath or other greens, so stop by the church before the supply is all gone. The **Marshall High School Booster Club** will thank you. The **Session** will be meeting this coming Monday evening, Dec 7, at 7 pm.

Among new **prayer concerns**, the person who died in the house fire we heard about in church a week ago was **Suzy Soliz**. Let us keep her children **David and Suzy** as well as the whole family in our prayers. Thanks, **Kelly Foster**, for letting us know.

Kate Untiedt's colleague **Nancy** with cancer has had a heart attack, but is back at home. Please keep her in your prayers.

Linda Dono has asked for prayers for the **Rev. Tom Wade** who is back in the hospital with leukemia.

And some **good news**: **Lucy Carpenter** raised money for the World Wildlife Fund to symbolically adopt a Red panda and Fennec fox, \$55@ and received plush stuffed animals as a thank you. You can do this too. Here are the websites for the two animals:

Red panda: https://gifts.worldwildlife.org/gift-center/gifts/Species-Adoptions/Red-Panda.aspx
Fennec fox: https://gifts.worldwildlife.org/gift-center/gifts/Species-Adoptions/fennec-fox.aspx
Way to go Lucy!

Rachel Osman has completed all of her college applications and now can sit back and wait for the acceptances to come rolling in!

My article on the Song of Songs (aka Song of Solomon) is now officially in the cue for publication by the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

Devotion for the second week in Advent

The Promise of Potential based on Light of the World, ch. 2, by Amy Jill Levine

Luke 1:26-56

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

^b Other ancient authorities add *Blessed are you among women*

⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Mary's Song of Praise

- ⁴⁶ And Mary said,
- "My soul magnifies the Lord,
- and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
- for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
- ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
- His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
- He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

- He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
- he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
- He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
- according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
 - to Abraham and to his descendants forever."
 - ⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

The Birth of John the Baptist¹

Why Mary Matters

As Protestants, we may think that Jesus's mother doesn't matter that much, but as Protestants, we believe that what the Bible says is important and all four Gospels record Mary's stories. In Mark, Mary is afraid that Jesus's exorcisms and association with tax collectors may give him a bad reputation. Matthew gives us the famous account of the virgin birth, an adaptation of the prophecy of a birth foretold to a young woman in Isaiah 7:14. In Luke, the angel Gabriel announces Mary's pregnancy. Hannah's song from the Old Testament book of Samuel is the basis for her song of praise, the Magnificat. Finally, in John is Mary's intercession at the wedding at Cana and her standing by at the cross.

The Name Mary

Mary's name recalls Miriam, Moses's sister, who was instrumental in saving Moses from Pharaoh's death. Later she leads the people in singing two verses of a victory song after the exodus (Exodus 15:1-2). Moses then sings a more extended version. Many scholars believe Miriam was the author of the piece since it was women like Deborah, who usually sang after military victories. Later the name Miriam changes to Maryam, and then to Mary. There are quite a few Mary's in the New Testament, as Mary became a popular name and remains popular today among Roman Catholics. One of my swimming friends, who grew up Catholic, is named Mary and belongs to a club of friends, all of whom are named Mary. I do not know any Jewish Mary's, but Miriam is a frequent Jewish name.

Mary's Background

The Gospels provide two genealogies for Jesus's father, Joseph, but none for Mary. Whenever such details are lacking, however, the human imagination finds ways to supply them. In Jewish tradition, such narratives are called *midrash* (plural: *midrashim*). The *Proto-evangelium* (*Pre-Gospel*) of James gives Mary's genealogy. Much like Samuel's parents in the Old Testament, a righteous, elderly, infertile couple, Joachim and Anna, have a child and name her Mary. When Mary is three, they bring her to the Jerusalem Temple. An elderly widower, Joseph, the father of James and other grown children, is found to care of her. She and her virgin companions spin the fabric for the Temple curtains. While she is so engaged, the angel Gabriel appears to her, announcing her pregnancy. Following Joseph's concern that she has been unfaithful, she gives birth, not in a house or a stable, but a cave.

The Annunciation (Announcement)

Birth announcements are literary conventions in the Bible. The first annunciation is to Hagar, telling her that she will bear a son whom God will bless (Genesis 16). In Genesis 18, the angel tells Abraham (with Sarah overhearing the news) that Sarah will become pregnant in her old age. Rebekah hears word about her difficult pregnancy in a dream (Genesis 25). And in Judges 13, Manoah's wife receives a visit from an angel who tells her that she will give birth to an unusual child. He will be a Nazirite from birth (no wine-drinking, meat-eating, or hair-cutting). Then Hannah receives her happy news after her co-wife, Peninah, has made life miserable for her; her song of joy is the basis of Mary's Magnificat (see below). Finally, Elijah tells the Shunemite woman that she will bear a son in 2 Kings 4.

In Luke, the angel comes to Mary. The angel greets Mary joyfully, saying, "The Lord is with you," which is comforting and a bit ominous. A response is required. Not all whom the divine calls respond to the summons. Mary is perplexed and terrified. The angel then tells her not to fear and says, "The Lord is honoring you." The child will be the Son of the most high God and reign over an eternal kingdom. The restoration of the Davidic kingdom had political implications: which king do you follow? Whom do you worship?

However, Mary responds with a practical question: How is this going to happen since I am a virgin? Luke answers, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you." In other words, "Don't worry about it. God will take care of that." Luke's genealogy begins with Adam, suggesting that we are all children of God, animated by God's spirit. In the pagan world, emperors were sons of God. In

the Jewish world of which Christians are heirs, we all are. Mary does not ask for a sign, but she receives one. Her barren cousin Elizabeth is pregnant.

Mary and Elizabeth

The meeting of the two pregnant women is a joyful one. Elizabeth is well on in her pregnancy; Mary is just beginning hers, but they have a sense of their kinship and their sons' critical roles. Even if this is retrospective history, the narration is gorgeous. Luke's Greek is elegant.

The Magnificat

This lovely hymn of praise shows that Mary's focus is not on herself but the divine. God has looked upon her in her low station in life. The salvation she speaks of is not other-worldly, but deliverance from oppression and tyranny here and now. God manifests divine mercy by scattering the arrogant and proud, pulling the proud off their thrones, and filling the hungry with good things (Luke 1:51-53).

We see these reversals in the songs of Hannah 1000 years earlier and Mary's Magnificat, as well as in our own lives when we reach out to help the poor. God accomplishes these reversals through our faithfulness to Torah and Gospel. The new covenant Jesus offers does not negate the old covenants with Abraham, Moses, or David; instead, it is a continuation of them. God had promised Abraham that Adonai would bless all the earth's families through him (Genesis 12:2-3).

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for six months. Before John the Baptizer's birth, she probably left to give Elizabeth and Zechariah privacy and to get home before traveling became difficult for her.

Sermon from Nov 29, 2020

Mark 13:24-37

24 "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree (Mt 24:32–35; Lk 21:29–33)

²⁸ "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

(Mt 24:36–44; Lk 21:34–36)

³² "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵ Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

Old Testament: Isaiah 64:1-9 Advent 1B

New Testament: Mark 13:24-37 IPC 11-29-2020

Stay Awake

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. The New Testament lesson includes what is sometimes called the "little apocalypse." Many people are fascinated with death and zombies, horror movies, and the like. This text brings up a similar widespread cultural concern, the end of the world. There have been so many movies on this theme *from Dr. Strangelove* (1964, a film satirizing humanity's madness possessing the means to destroy itself systemically. As a cold-war stand-off spins horribly out of control and a nuclear apocalypse becomes inevitable, Kubrick cranks up the jet-black humor to its cackling limits. At the same time, Peter Sellers delivers a career-best triptych of tragicomic performances) to *Andromeda Strain*, 1971 (Never have lab coats, microscopes, and Petri dishes felt so nerve-wracking. Based on the novel by Michael 'Jurassic Park' Crichton, *Andromeda Strain* follows an elite group of scientists as they battle to understand and nullify an extra-terrestrial microbe that threatens all life on earth. This one sounds all too realistic, given the pandemic we're living through. Then there's *THREADS* 1984, BBC's faux-documentary on a nuclear conflict and its after-effects on one Yorkshire town. It forever scarred anyone fortunate/unfortunate enough to have seen it at the time, and it's since lost none of its power to shock and disturb.

Horribly plausible and grimly meticulous, *Threads* gives nuke-bombed nightmares for weeks. Then there are *12 MONKEYS* (1995). It was inspired by the 1962 French short film *Le Jetée*, an apocalyptic before-and-after. Prisoner-from-the-future Bruce Willis is forced back through time to uncover the source of an airborne virus created by humans that plucks the planet clean of life and sends the remains of humanity scuttling underground, another one that sounds all too real today. Then there was *CHILDREN OF MEN* (2006). It was the slowest, saddest, cruelest apocalypse imaginable. The year is 2027, and two decades of global human infertility have pushed society to the point of collapse. Those not driven to suicide by the futility of a world without children trudge onwards toward obsolescence. But then, a miracle occurs, as a jaded Clive Owen uncovers a fragile ray of hope. And there are probably at least another hundred similar films out there. I just skimmed the cream off the top.

Just as we all seem fascinated by the end of the world, occasionally, someone claims to have calculated the date of the end of the world, despite this passage stating very clearly that no one knows when it will be. Prophesying the end of the world is also not a strictly Christian business. Simon bar Giora and the Jewish Essenes "saw the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 66–70 in Judea as the final end-time battle which would bring about the arrival of the Messiah. By the authority of Simon, coins were minted declaring the redemption of Israel." (Wikipedia). Pope Sylvester II and many others predicted the end of the world on Jan 1, 1000. There were riots in Europe, and pilgrims headed to the east.

Martin Luther predicted the world's demise before 1600. Christopher Columbus thought it would occur in 1656. John Wesley predicted it would happen in 1896. For Jehovah's Witnesses, it was 1941; for Jeanne Dixon, 1962; and for Pat Robertson of the 700 Club, 1982. Many people, including Jerry Falwell, thought the Y2K computer bug would be the spark that would trigger the end of the world. There are a few predictions for future dates, including one for 2020 by Jeanne Dixon (who previously predicted 2041). Scientific predictions of the demise of the earth are anywhere from 300,000 to 10 duotrigintillion.

We can be confident that the earth will not last forever. However long it lasts, the text this morning is direct and straightforward: Watch and wait, or in the contemporary vernacular: Be woke. Pay attention. Do your work, your kingdom work. Don't worry about when the kingdom is coming. In a sense, it is already here. When we take care of each other and those needing our help, we are already living in the kingdom.

Be woke. It is that simple and that difficult. We are easily distracted. We are busy. We are tired. We are anxious. We are afraid. But God has given each of us tasks in the kingdom of God that we can do. In v 32 in the mini-parable in the scripture, Jesus compares himself to a man who goes away but leaves instruction for his servants as to what work they are to do. Our responsibility is to be alert, pay attention, and open our hearts to what God tells us to do.

What does the Lord want us to do? We cannot do everything. We have limitations. But God rarely moves in the world except through our hands and feet. What gifts do we have that God can use for the building of God's earthly kingdom? God is not going to ask us to do something that we cannot do. If we genuinely lived attuned to the divine voice, we would all be so much better off, because together we can meet our needs better than we can individually. There are places on my back that I can't reach, but you can. There are lonely spots in your soul that you cannot fix yourself, but your brother or sister can, and you can do the same for your brother or sister.

So, stay awake. Don't worry about when the kingdom is coming. Instead, let's do our part to bring the kingdom into our own beloved community right here at IPC. Church is not just for Sunday morning. We are a community 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We don't have to be physically here to feel the connection with each other. We are blessed to have telephones, and most of us have internet through which we can communicate. Stay awake. Stay connected. We may grow tired of Zoom, but I am grateful for Zoom. I would prefer to see all of your faces when I preach clearly, but I am so happy that we can meet virtually. We didn't have to shut down. And before long, we will be able to meet face to face. Maybe someday you will need a supply preacher, and we will finally get to meet each other in the flesh.

Lectionary for the Second Week of Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11

- 40:1 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
- 40:2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.
- 40:3 A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- 40:4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.
- 40:5 Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."
- 40:6 A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.
- 40:7 The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass.
- 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.
- 40:9 Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"
- 40:10 See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.
- 40:11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

- 85:1 LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
- 85:2 You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin. Selah
- 85:8 Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
- 85:9 Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 85:10 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
- 85:11 Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.
- 85:12 The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.
- 85:13 Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

2 Peter 3:8-15a

- 3:8 But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.
- 3:9 The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.
- 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.
- 3:11 Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness,
- 3:12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?

- 3:13 But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.
- 3:14 Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish;
- 3:15a and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him.

Mark 1:1-8

- 1:1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- 1:2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;
- 1:3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"
- 1:4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- 1:5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.
- 1:6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.
- 1:7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.
- 1:8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Link for Recording of 11-29-2020 Worship

https://zoom.us/rec/share/mHBMyma8vdcb23kM25Q4QKRHSSPGH0RCj-mhUEGT1IVTO4J3LL7QOZSv17OzxM0w.9x7ItIvRZPeibKDm

Access Passcode: 8%JuF9mwZoom Link for Worship for 12-6-2020

Link for Worship for Next week, 12-6-2020

Topic: IPC Worship

Time: Nov 29, 2020 10:30 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada) Every week on Sun, until Jan 31, 2021, 10 occurrence(s)

Nov 29, 2020 10:30 AM

Dec 6, 2020 10:30 AM

Dec 13, 2020 10:30 AM

Dec 20, 2020 10:30 AM

Dec 27, 2020 10:30 AM

Jan 3, 2021 10:30 AM

Jan 10, 2021 10:30 AM

Jan 17, 2021 10:30 AM

Jan 24, 2021 10:30 AM

Jan 31, 2021 10:30 AM

Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.

Weekly: https://zoom.us/meeting/tJMtduhrTgoGtxB08s_6SDKTEmItyDq2K1M/ics?icsToken=98tyKuCvrjosE9eWshmPRowEAoj4 M_PztnZBjbdFvk-9EB8FUSfdAsdPG6ZmNMmC

Join Zoom Meeting

https://zoom.us/j/97016933208?pwd=dFo0Z3duMi9sd0RvQ2p2VzY4ZEZBUT09

Meeting ID: 970 1693 3208

Passcode: **pcJY1z** One tap mobile

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Passcode: 531963

Find your local number: https://zoom.us/u/ab3SeYyY1a