

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

1st SUNDAY of ADVENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 80)*

- One: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!"
All: **"Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved."**
One: With expectancy we come to listen, to give, to invest ourselves in this time of worship.
All: **In anticipation of God's coming to us, let us come to worship the Lord.**

***OPENING HYMN** "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates" GtG 93

1. **Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates;
behold the King of glory waits;
the King of kings is drawing near;
the Savior of the world is here.**
2. **Fling wide the portals of your heart;
make it a temple, set apart
from earthly use for heaven's employ,
adorned with prayer and love and joy.**
3. **Redeemer, come! I open wide
my heart to thee; here, Lord, abide.
Let me thy inner presence feel;
thy grace and love in me reveal.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God, we sing of joy at your coming and inviting you into our hearts. But our lives show a different truth. We are so busy we have no time for you. Our schedules do not allow for your intrusion in our lives. Too often our joy is only

superficial, founded on things that are fleeting and unimportant. But you continue to come to us, and invite us to receive you in our hearts. Forgive us when we turn you away. Help us to hear your call and invitation. Enable us to release our lives to your presence and transforming power. Open us up to your coming and new life. For we ask this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from Luke 2)*

One: In this is love, that God gives us the gift of Jesus Christ to remind us of the truth of Immanuel: that God is with us.

All: **This is indeed “good news of great joy for all the people.”**

One: So rejoice and be glad, for in Jesus Christ we are loved, in Jesus Christ we are accepted, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

All: **“Glory to God in the highest heaven!”**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH: THE CANDLE OF HOPE

One: Advent means ‘coming’. The season we have hoped for has come. The one we had hoped for has come. And we have a certain hope, for the promises of God are sure. So we live by our hope in the one who came long ago, the one who comes to us still, the one who will come again.

All: **We all have hopes and dreams and expectations in life. With the birth of the Christ-child, the angels proclaim the good news that this holy infant is the only hope we need in life: that in him all our needs are met, all our wishes known, all our hopes fulfilled.**

One: So we light the first candle to remind us of the hope we have in Christ. May his hope shine in us always.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”
(Romans 15:13)

Let us pray.

Unison: **Dear God, we rejoice in the firm hope we have grounded in Christ. May we be guided and encouraged by that hope. And may we always look forward with eager anticipation to Christ's coming to us each and every day. Amen.**

Sing: "O Little Town of Bethlehem" GtG 121 (*Verse 1*)

1. **O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.**

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SCRIPTURE READINGS John 1:1-3,10-14
I Corinthians 11:23-26
Matthew 24 (selected)

JOHN 1:1-3,10-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. ...*

¹⁰ *He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of human will, but of God.*

¹⁴ *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

I CORINTHIANS 11:23-26 (New Revised Standard Version)

²³ *For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

MATTHEW 24 (selected) (New Revised Standard Version)

³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" ⁴ Jesus answered them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: ⁸ all this is but the beginning of the birthpangs. ...

²⁹ "Immediately after the suffering of those days
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from heaven,
and the powers of heaven will be shaken.

³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Humankind will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see 'the Son of Humankind coming on the clouds of heaven' with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ...

³⁶ "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Humankind. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Humankind. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴² Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Humankind is coming at an unexpected hour.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Point of Contact" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Advent. A Latin word meaning 'coming'. A time and a season in the church year when we celebrate and ponder the coming of Christ. Not just one kind of coming, or one time of coming, but several.

Which can cause some difficulties, for at least some of these comings are unfamiliar to us.

We talk of a past coming with which we are very familiar – or at least we think we are. For “there were three kings.” Actually, there were three gifts; we don’t know how many kings there were.

“He was born at night.” Actually, the angels appeared to the shepherds at night; we don’t know what time of day he was born.

“Well, we know he was born in winter.” Though actually, since the shepherds were out in the fields watching their flocks by night, it was probably a warmer time of year.

And we must remember, our talk of his past coming occurred in a time and place very different from our own.

We have electricity for lights. They didn't, using only torches and oil lamps to light the way for them.

We have cars and trucks, planes and trains to get around. They didn't, having only horses and donkeys and camels, slow moving sail boats, and, of course, their own two feet.

We benefit from the use of synthetic materials and medical technology that saves lives, and the use of computers that save time. They didn't, having only their wits and trial and error to save lives, and not much at all to save time.

And into this time and place far different from ours, Christ came. Born of unassuming parents in a land occupied by a foreign power. Heralded by angels that we may not be sure we believe in. Visited by smelly, suspicious looking shepherds, and by strangers from far away serving as a cross between legitimate astronomers and not-so-legitimate astrologers.

So, let’s face it: when we talk about the past coming of Christ, we are on unfamiliar ground.

Then there is talk of a future coming – talk about unfamiliar ground. Quite honestly, the imagery used in Matthew and elsewhere to describe it is even older than the past coming of which we speak. It is imagery born of a time and a world-view very foreign to ours, where the sun darkens and the moon turns to red and the stars fall from the sky, and the Son of Humankind rides on the clouds.

Imagery used to describe Christ’s coming in power and glory – whatever that means.

Imagery that catches only the smallest, briefest, barest glimpse of what might be, in the who-knows-when.

Maybe we can identify in small part, because we, too, know of yearnings and expectations that are often only half known and partially understood; hopes and dreams and visions of the future that are only barely glimpsed and momentarily revealed.

Still, when we talk of the future coming of Christ, we are on very unfamiliar ground.

So, here we are celebrating Advent, the coming of Christ. And maybe at this point, it’s kind of hard to grasp.

So far we have a past coming – that we thought we knew, but now we’re not sure – described in a time and place far removed from us.

And we have a future coming – that we’re sure we’re not sure about – couched in concepts and terminology and imagery far removed from us.

And both of them might seem distant, out of touch, irrelevant to us, to have nothing much to do with us.

But there is another coming of which we speak during this celebration of comings: a coming that serves as a point of contact with these other two comings from which we seem distant and far removed.

And that is Christ's present coming.

There is his coming in the present moment in the least of these among us, even if we be that least one. He comes in our neighbors and our family members, in our friends and even strangers – in their faces and their lives – and he challenges us to respond in love and caring and service.

There is his coming in the present moment as we receive him in our hearts and he touches us with his Spirit: that movement, that experience of a renewed awareness of his presence and his work that we can only explain by saying that he came and touched us, moving us to songs of praise and tears of confession and quietly mumbled words of thanks.

But there is also another present coming of his that we celebrate this morning, in particular, that serves as a point of contact with his past and future comings.

And that is his coming here at this table [--the communion table--].

Now, not every congregation starts Advent with communion. But I believe it to be appropriate, and even helpful, for us to do just that.

For we see his coming in this fellowship together around the table, much like the fellowship we enjoy around other tables in our homes and elsewhere. We affirm his coming in this bread which tastes an awful lot like the bread we had as part of a turkey sandwich just the other day. We acknowledge his coming in this juice which tastes an awful lot like juice and drink we have had elsewhere at other times.

Here at this table we experience Christ's very present presence, his coming to us here and now.

And in this present coming of his we remember his past coming.

As we come to this table, we remember that coming of his in the past, in a place far away and a time long ago. We remember that coming of his that was marked by the celebration of angels at his birth. That coming of his that also included his ministry and healing, and his teaching the people many things about God and love and ourselves and life. That coming of his during which he also taught us about death. For, as Paul reminds us in those words, it was

on the night when he was betrayed [that he] took a loaf of bread, and...broke it and said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

And it was on that same night, the night before he died, that

he took the cup...saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this...in remembrance of me."

As we know and experience Jesus Christ in his present coming here in the Lord's Supper, it provides a point of contact for us with his past coming long ago and far away. We can know and affirm that his past coming is significant for us, too, as he calls and invites us to this table now. This past coming is the reason we celebrate his present coming, because he is here. And

to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God

– reconciled, restored, embraced – children of God

This we celebrate and remember at this table.

But there is more. For in this present coming that we celebrate this morning, we also ponder that future coming of which we spoke: that future coming that is so far removed from us in thought and concept and perspective and imagery. For, as Paul adds to his instructions,

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We proclaim – in word and deed, in life and death – the Lord's death, which is central to that past coming of which we spoke. We celebrate the love and acceptance, the restoration and reconciliation, the wholeness and peace that we know in Christ. We proclaim that message about his death and his coming. We proclaim it to each other, lest we forget. And we proclaim it to the world that all might know: proclaim it for those who have heard the news before but didn't (or couldn't, or wouldn't) believe; and proclaim it for those who haven't heard it at all before.

And we continue to proclaim that good news until he comes in power and glory – whenever that might be, however it will happen. But we proclaim it until he comes: until that time when we need not proclaim it anymore, because

*all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.*

(Isaiah 52:10b NRSV)

But until then, we continue to proclaim his love and healing, his reconciliation and way. So there is work to do – now. And here at his table, we are fed for the task at hand and nurtured for the journey ahead.

So here, at this table, we remember that death long ago, and his coming far away. And we profess that his coming was for us, too, in the here and now. And we celebrate his presence with us here and now.

And here, at this table, we proclaim his death, looking forward to the time when we shall no longer need to proclaim his death, for the message that we know and believe will be known and seen by all.

And here, at this table, he comes. The same one who came long ago, and who will come...who knows when. Here at this table, he comes. Now, at this time, he comes. Immanuel: God with us. The Word become flesh, dwelling in our midst.

And he comes here and now to call us and claim us, to sustain us and nurture us, to encourage us and undergird us, to comfort and guide us, to teach us and transform us; to help us to live more fully in this present of ours, as we celebrate his coming in the past and proclaim his coming in the future.

***HYMN** “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” GtG 347 (*Verses 1-2*)

- 1. Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly minded,**

(continued...)

~ 7 ~

**for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
our full homage to demand.**

- 2. King of kings, yet born of Mary,
as of old on earth he stood,
Lord of lords, in human vesture,
in the body and the blood,
he will give to all the faithful
his own self for heavenly food.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *(The Apostles' Creed - Contemporary)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

(Today's translation of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission from Book of Common Worship, copyright 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Gracious Lord...
All: ...come to us in your mercy.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

Dear God, we thank you for your love made known to us in Jesus Christ. We thank you for your presence made known to us through the Holy Spirit. May we have hope in you always, trusting in your constant advents in our lives. Bless us as we seek to serve you in all that we do. Receive the gifts we offer, and use them, and us, to further the coming of your kingdom here on earth. For it is in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: **We lift them to the Lord.**

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

(The prayer continues...)

The Lord's Prayer (Traditional)

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please partake of each element as you are served, celebrating how Christ comes to you.)

Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” GtG 82

1. **Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us;
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.**

2. **Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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