

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FIRST SUNDAY of ADVENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We come to worship the Lord our God.
All: **We come to worship Christ the King.**
One: We come to shout and sing and rejoice.
All: **We come to listen and learn and grow.**
One: We come because God invites us to come.
All: **We come because God comes to us.**

***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.**

Words: Georg Weissel, 1642; trans. Catherine Winkworth, 1855, 1863
Music: TRURO, *Musica Sacra*, ca. 1778
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God, we confess to you our sins, trusting in your ever-flowing grace and mercy. We want to decide for ourselves when and where and how you will come. Or we ignore your coming all together, too busy for you or unmoved to care. Forgive us, coming God. Make us expectant of your working in our midst. Make of us an Advent people, eager for your coming, watching for your coming, participating in your coming. And make us alive to your presence in our midst. For we pray in the name of the one who came, who comes, and who will come again: Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from Matthew 1 & Luke 2)*

One: The One who comes in the Child of Bethlehem is the One who comes to redeem and restore.
All: **His name is Jesus, "for he will save his people from their sins."**
One: This is indeed "good news of great joy for all the people."
All: **So let us rejoice and be glad, for in Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**
Alleluia!

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you all.
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 OF THE ADVENT WREATH: The Candle of Hope

One: We approach the season of Advent full of anticipation and expectation.
All: **We long for something wonderful to happen. We hope for God's promised salvation.**

One: What is the shape of our hope?

All: **The shape of our hope is the small form of a baby and the promise of new life.**

One: As Isaiah prophesied to King Ahaz, "the Lord will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel, that is, God with us." (Isaiah 7:14)

As the angel proclaimed to the shepherds, "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:11-12)

(continued...)

All: So, God gives us hope in the form of a baby. God offers salvation in the birth of a child.

Sing: O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” GtG 88 (*Verse 1*)

Words: Latin prose, pre-9th cent.; trans. composite

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Tune: VENI EMMANUEL, Plainsong; adapt. Thomas Helmore, 1852; arr. John Weaver, 1988

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SCRIPTURE READINGS Isaiah 63:15-64:12
Mark 13:32-37

ISAIAH 63:15-64:12 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹⁵ *Look down from heaven and see,
from your holy and glorious habitation.
Where are your zeal and your might?
The yearning of your heart and your compassion?
They are withheld from me.*

¹⁶ *For you are our father,
though Abraham does not know us
and Israel does not acknowledge us;
you, O Lord, are our father;
our Redeemer from of old is your name.*

¹⁷ *Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways
and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?
Turn back for the sake of your servants,
for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage.*

¹⁸ *Your holy people took possession for a little while;
but now our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.*

¹⁹ *We have long been like those whom you do not rule,
like those not called by your name.*

^{64:1} *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—*

² *as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—*

*to make your name known to your adversaries,
 so that the nations might tremble at your presence!*
³ *When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
 you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.*
⁴ *From ages past no one has heard,
 no ear has perceived,
 no eye has seen any God besides you,
 who works for those who wait for God.*
⁵ *You meet those who gladly do right,
 those who remember you in your ways.*
*But you were angry, and we sinned;
 because you hid yourself we transgressed.*

⁶ *We have all become like one who is unclean,
 and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
 We all fade like a leaf,
 and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*
⁷ *There is no one who calls on your name,
 or attempts to take hold of you;
 for you have hidden your face from us,
 and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.*
⁸ *Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
 we are the clay, and you are our potter;
 we are all the work of your hand.*
⁹ *Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
 and do not remember iniquity forever.
 Now consider, we are all your people.*
¹⁰ *Your holy cities have become a wilderness,
 Zion has become a wilderness,
 Jerusalem a desolation.*
¹¹ *Our holy and beautiful house,
 where our ancestors praised you,
 has been burned by fire,
 and all our pleasant places have become ruins.*
¹² *After all this, will you restrain yourself, O Lord?
 Will you keep silent, and punish us so severely?*

MARK 13:32-37 (New Revised Standard Version)

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.”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Coming Still” by Pastor Bill Vincent

The people's cry was loud, their agony great. Despairing that God had forsaken them, they cried out in anguish:

*Look down from heaven and see,
from your holy and glorious habitation.
Where are your zeal and your might?
The yearning of your heart and your compassion?
They are withheld from me.*

...

*We have long been...
like those not called by your name.*

...

*After all this, will you restrain yourself, O Lord?
Will you keep silent, and punish us so severely?*

They despaired that God had forgotten them and abandoned them to their own devices. They cried in anguish that God would return to them and deliver them from their bondage in exile.

The people finally did return from exile to their beloved land. The Temple was rebuilt, albeit a modest one in comparison to the original. In the years that followed, times continued to be rough and life tough for the people. And there remained a strand of tradition in the people's faith that looked to God to deliver them from such squalor and anguish of life, and return the people and the land to the glory days of old. Especially as the iron fist of Rome grew stronger and stronger, tempers flared and emotions ran high among many of the people, believing that the time would come when God

*would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at [God's] presence –*

...

*to make [God's] name known to [God's] adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at [God's] presence!*

The specific content of that hope ran the gamut from fantastic, mythical visions, to powerful armies and military might. What was held in common by many was the belief that God would come to them in a special way to deliver the people.

And come God did. Though not as expected. Not as a super hero floating on the clouds, nor as a reincarnation of military leaders from of old. But as a mere child – an infant, even. Lying helpless and defenseless on a bed of barnyard fodder.

Even years before, the people had some notion of the unanticipated ways of God, as in the words of our Old Testament passage:

When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect...

But who would have thought a little child would be God's awesome and mighty act on behalf of the people?

Even in our own day, there are people who believe that God will come in a special way to deliver the "righteous ones" – whoever they may be. And their belief is not without justification.

"When the Son of humankind comes in his glory..." (Matthew 25:31)

It was the signs for such times that Jesus was sharing with his disciples when they left the Temple that day: the end times; the last days; the second coming of Christ; the Parousia. There have been those in every generation since then who have dared to say they know when that day will be – and they've all been wrong. And then there are those who say all talk about such things is rubbish.

And to all of these people – the convert and skeptic alike – the words we read in Mark offer guidance and challenge and warning.

To those eager to welcome Christ's coming tomorrow, they are warned,
about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Even when we *"hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; ... the end is still to come."* To those too eager to know – or who think they already know – both the day and the hour, they are told, "Not yet; not yet."

But there are also those – maybe some of us – who might consider any discussion regarding the second coming of Christ as pure nonsense. We are rational, modern, 21st century types. And to those whose mind turns skeptical when talk turns to the Parousia, the word for them is this: "He will come, he will come indeed." We may not know the time when, but he will come. We may not know exactly how, but he will come. And the memory of that birth in Bethlehem – what someone calls that "**unexpected divine invasion**" (Lamar Williamson, Interpretation series, p.243) – warns us not to discount the coming of the Lord.

So watch. Like the servants left in charge of the master's possessions we must be on the alert for the return of our Master. And we must be faithful to the task given us while we wait in this interim: we must be faithful to our ministry and mission and calling.

For come God will. Though probably not as expected. And when the final coming is done, more than likely all people – both those who expected a coming and those who did not – will turn to their neighbor and ask, "Who would have thought God would come in such a way?"

But here we sit today, with the cries of exile-weary Israelites too far off to be heard, and the shouts of overly eager doomsayers falling on unconcerned ears. We are more attuned to the cries of war in the Middle East or Ukraine and the shouts of sales on cyber Monday.

The past coming of the Lord is a far-off historical event that we celebrate in ways often far removed from its true meaning. The future coming of the Lord is too far-fetched to be taken seriously, and we dismiss its outlandish and outmoded imagery as the ravings of an unbridled and unrestrained imagination.

And yet, we have heard of another of God's comings. Heard of it in the highways and byways and alleyways of the world. Just a rumor, more than not. But still.

And the memory of that birth in Bethlehem warns us not to discount the rumors of the coming of the Lord.

**Our God is the One who comes to us
in a burning bush,
in an angel's song,
in a newborn child.**

writes author Ann Weems;

**When God is ready
God will come
even to a godforsaken place
like a stable in Bethlehem.**

(“The Coming of God,” Kneeling in Bethlehem)

Yes, even in the present God comes to us, but in unexpected ways. Who would have thought that God would come in the least of these around us? Who would have thought that God would come in a small piece of bread and a bare sip of juice? Who would have thought?

Yet come God does, to remind us once again of the impact of that coming long ago: of that one born in a manger, executed on a cross, raised from the dead.

Come God does, to convince us of that coming sometime hence,

**when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea,**

(“God Is Working His Purpose Out” words by Arthur Campbell Ainger, 1894; cf. Isaiah 11:9)

and all God's people shall live in harmony.

Come God does, to awaken us to new possibilities even in those parts of our lives we thought long dead.

Come God does, to comfort us in the midst of our own exiles of despair, to sustain us along the journey of our life.

And so Ann Weems concludes,

**Watch . . .
for you know not when
God comes.
Watch, that you might be found
whenever
wherever
God comes.**

(“The Coming of God”)

Be alert for that “unexpected divine invasion” in your life and in mine and in the life of this our world.

And watch, by being faithful to God's calling to us, here and now.

Watch, by being alert to God's working in our midst and in the world.

Watch, by being open to God's invading our set structures in life and rearranging them to the tune of joy and love and “peace on earth, goodwill to all.”

Watch, by being willing to be servants of God's advent in our lives.

For this God has come to us in a little child, invading our complacency and coldness.
This God will come to us in the glorious conclusion of history, invoking the praise and worship of the world.

This God comes to us still, in the unexpected and the unknown, inviting us to new life and faithfulness.

And so we sing,

Come, thou long-expected Jesus.

(“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus,” words by Charles Wesley, 1744)

Come, thou un-expected Jesus. Come to us, as you have before and as you will at sometime.
Come, Lord Jesus. Come to us, still.

***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.**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1744

Music: HYFRYDOL, Rowland Hugh Prichard, 1830; harm.

Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

In life and in death we belong to God.

Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit,

(continued...)

**we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: God of our salvation...
All: ...hear our prayers.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

You are present to us, O God, in the bounty around us. We celebrate your gifts by sharing them with others. Make us joyful givers. Make us grateful recipients. And accept our giving that the gift of your Son may be shared with all the world. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

One: The Lord be with you.
All: **And also with you.**
One: Lift up your hearts.
All: **We lift them to the Lord.**
One: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

(The prayer continues...)

The Lord's Prayer (Contemporary)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(With the passing of the bread, please wait until all have been served so that all may partake together, reflecting our unity in Christ.)

Sing: "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,
for with blessing in His hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
our full homage to demand.**

(With the passing of the cup, please partake as soon as received as an expression of our personal relationship with Christ.)

**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.**

Words: Liturgy of St. James, 4th cent.; trans. Gerard Moultrie, 1864, alt.
Music: PICARDY, French melody; arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906
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Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You” GtG 104

1. **O Lord, how shall I meet you,
how welcome you aright?
Your people long to greet you,
my hope, my heart’s delight!
O kindle, Lord most holy,
a lamp within my breast,
to do in spirit lowly
all that may please you best.**

2. **Love caused your incarnation;
love brought you down to me;
your thirst for my salvation
procured my liberty.
O love beyond all telling,
that led you to embrace
in love, all loves excelling,
our lost and fallen race.**

3. **You come, O Lord, with gladness,
in mercy and goodwill,
to bring an end to sadness
and bid our fears be still.
In patient expectation
we live for that great day
when your renewed creation
your glory shall display.**

Words: Paul Gerhardt, 1653; trans. Catherine Winkworth and others, 1863, alt.
Music: VALET WILL ICH DIR GEBEN, Melchior Teschner, 1614; harm.
William Henry Monk, 1861
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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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