

Our Service of Worship for December 5, 2021
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Westwood First Presbyterian Church

Cincinnati, OH



Welcome and Announcements

Prelude: “*Savior of the Nations, Come*”—arr. Paul Manz

During the Prelude, please take a moment to prepare for worship.

Ringling of the Tower Bell

Introit: “*Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending*”—arr. Willcocks

** Call to Worship—Lighting the Advent Wreath

Reader 1: On this second Sunday of Advent we hear stories of the dreams and longings of God's people. The Hebrew people dreamed of a king who would rule with justice and peace. John the Baptist invited people to dream with him about the coming of God's reign.

Reader 2: *We share these dreams that can lead to life-changing action.*

Reader 1: God's people have long dreamed of the coming of peace, justice, and faithfulness to God's ways. In our own time we dream of equality and good life for everyone. Such dreams come from God and inspire us to work for justice and peace.

Reader 2: *With John the Baptist we dream of making crooked paths straight, of making smooth highways broad enough for all God's people to move on together in peace and harmony.*

Reader 1: Our actions can help build that highway. God's dream can become our dream.

Reader 2: *Last week we lit the first candle. Its flickering flame reminded us that our waiting is to be both contemplative and active. The flame of the second candle reminds us that just as candles can be given a flame, so God's dreams can become real in our world. (The second purple candle is lit)*

Opening Prayer

** Hymn No. 38: “*It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*” (verses 1-2, 4) *

A Time of Confession

Invitation to Confession

Prayer of Confession (unison)

Merciful God, forgive us. Forgive us when we are quick to point the finger at someone else. Forgive us when we put our heads down and ignore the cries of injustice. Forgive us when we presume to understand the complexity of issues that divide and distract the peoples of the land your feet once walked. Forgive us, heal us, encourage us, and speak through us, that we may be transformed through the refiner's fire, and the offerings of our hands and our hearts may prepare the way for the Christ child to be welcomed among us in peace. In His name we humbly pray. Amen.

Moment of Silent Confession (*Silent, personal prayers may be offered.*)

Assurance of God's Love and Mercy (based on *Isaiah 12:2-6*—responsive)

Hear these words of comfort from the prophet Isaiah: "Surely God is our salvation; we will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is our strength and our might; God has become our salvation." Friends, God has become our salvation, indeed! Open yourselves to the joy and peace to be found in our forgiveness; never more are we to be held captive by that which seeks to tear us from God. Hear the Good News of the Gospel: we are forgiven!

Lead us in your peace, O God, and teach us your love. You are the God of our days, we wait for you to come to us. Amen.

May the peace of Christ, be with you throughout Advent and always.

And also with you.

** Response to God's Grace (unison)

Gloria, in excelsis Deo! Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture Readings: *Malachi 3:1-4, 6; Luke 3:1-12a, 15-18* *

Sermon: "*The Way It's Supposed to Be* "

A Time of Offering

[No collection will be taken. Please place your offerings in the collection plate just outside the sanctuary. Thank you for your generosity!]

Invitation

Offertory Prayer (unison)

Holy One, this Advent season we wait in peace, and we give generously in peace and gratitude. A peace deeper than our anxiety and fear. A peace growing from our trust in your loving power. Receive our tithes and offerings, and use them to bring your peace to our world. In the Savior's name, we pray. Amen.

Anthem: "*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*"—Holst

Noelle Scheper, soprano; Tommy Wessendarp, baritone and Chancel Choir

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Invitation to the Lord's Table

[*ALL are invited to Christ's table, remembering that access is not a right conferred upon the worthy, but a privilege given to the undeserving, enabled by the very act of which the sacrament reminds us.*]

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Words of Institution and the Sharing of the Elements

The Pastoral Prayer After Communion and The Lord's Prayer

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.

** Hymn No. 12: "*People, Look East*" (verses 1-2, 5) *

Charge and Benediction

Response: "*Bless Us, Father*"—Anna Laura Page

Postlude: "*Lift Up Your Heads*"—arr. David Cherwein

Where indicated (**) please rise, and stand as you are able.

* The words to the hymns and the Scripture reading are included in the order of worship.

MARANATHA

COME LORD JESUS!

Leading Worship This Morning:

Rev. Dr. Jeff Colarossi, *Pastor*

Heather MacPhail, *Organist/Director of Music Ministries*

Jane Colarossi, *Lay Worship Leader*



Prayer Requests and Announcements

✚ November West-Fed Food Pantry: pasta (rigatoni, linguine, farfalle, etc.) & pasta sauce

✚ Prayers are requested for:

- ♥ Anna and Dick Rechel, who have contracted COVID
- ♥ Susie, a friend of the Kochheisers, who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in October and who is beginning a several months long regimen of chemotherapy.
- ♥ Kathy Kiefer, who has been hospitalized with kidney issues.
- ♥ Wendy Beckman, recovering from shoulder replacement surgery
- ♥ Sharon Crowell, recuperating from knee replacement surgery.
- ♥ Pat Mueller, recovering from a successful double transplant.
- ♥ Linda Kugele who is dealing with breathing issues.
- ♥ Betsy Forte, Chancie Brown's sister, dealing with personal issues.
- ♥ Carol Hunt, Dave Hunt's mom, recovering from a series of falls.
- ♥ The discernment team: Steve Beckman, Mary Ellen Betz, Jane Colarossi, Kent Kochheiser, Ann Regan, Phil Zorn, Bruce Smith, Jan Tepe, Bode Olakanmi.

✚ The Flowers this morning have been donated:

- ♥ By Sandy Morris and Cynthia Hines, in memory of our beloved mother, Mary Stith Ray, sister Melissa Snyder and step-sister Melinda Ray.
- ♥ By Elizabeth Durrell in memory of her husband Jim.

✚ **Monday School** will continue tomorrow, Dec. 6 at 6:30pm via Zoom. Please use the link previously sent out. If you need it resent, please let me know. We will be discussing chapters 8 and 9.

✚ Set up for the **City Gospel Mission Christmas Store** will begin Friday, Dec. 3, the Store will operate Wed. Dec. 8 through Sat. Dec. 12.

✚ **We will have poinsettias available for purchase** to decorate the sanctuary in the weeks before Christmas in honor—or in memory—of family and friends. There will be a separate order form in the bulletin and Parish Bell, as will be available in the narthex as well. Please have your order and payment by Dec. 12.

Hymns

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear—No. 38 (verses 1-2, 4)

1. It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:
“Peace on the earth, good will to all, from heaven’s all-gracious King.”
The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.
2. Still through the cloven skies they come with peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats o’er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains, they bend on hovering wing,
And ever o’er its Babel sounds the blessed angels sing.
4. For lo! the days are hastening on, by prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world give back the song which now the angels sing.



People, Look East—No. 12 (verses 1-2, 5)

1. People, look east. The time is near of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today: love, the guest, is on the way.
2. Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare, one more seed is planted there:
Give up your strength the seed to nourish, that in course the flower may flourish.
People, look east and sing today: Love, the rose, is on the way.
3. Angels, announce with shouts of mirth Christ who brings new life to earth.
Set every peak and valley humming with the word, the Lord is coming.
People, look east and sing today: Love, the Lord, is on the way.



Scripture Readings

First Reading: Malachi 3:1-4, 6—The Coming Messenger

¹ See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; ³ he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

⁶ For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished.

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:1-18—The Proclamation of John the Baptist

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

³ He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”



⁷ John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹ Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” ¹¹ In reply he said to them, “Whoever has

two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” ¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized...

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” ¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.



Moment for Mission—Second Sunday of Advent

The doing of Advent is not the same as experiencing it. This can be an invitation to enter into the Advent we really all want. An Advent that invites the deepest of feelings amidst the restlessness of the forwardness of time. An Advent that is not just about all the doing but also about all of the needed being. It might very well be a choice to exist in such a way that insists on or even assumes straight paths, valleys filled, and rough ways smoothed.

Preparing the way of the Lord does not have to be that which requires an endless “to do” list. I don’t know about you, but this is really hard for me. My lists are long right now. That which needs to be accomplished between now and December 25 leaves little room for an awareness of how I am experiencing these days of expectation.

But, if I am honest, this has always been difficult for me. I find myself always looking to the next task, the next item on my list to cross off, the next whatever. It has always been challenging to be in the moment, to feel what is now and let now just be. Why is that?

Choosing being over doing continues to be that which demands a daily decision. And most certainly, the consciousness of seeing salvation continues to evade me. So I think this may very well be the necessity of Advent. Being. Because being is inherent to incarnation.

It's almost as if Advent is the necessary time to prepare us for the being of God. Because God incarnate is not a concept but a commitment to the human experience in all of its fullness—every day, every minute, every second. Advent should not be something to hurry along. Our endless attempts to accomplish tasks seem only to be that which seeks to secure that time might move forward, and why do we want that? What is our hurry?

That might be what is at stake. Our hurriedness. Our lack of patience. Our desire to move along that which should take more time than we think. Going to the next step has to take time. But, as Advent helps us see, the time is worth it. Advent suggests that God seems to want us to wait. God seems to expect expectation. God seems to know that the immediacy of desire is not the same as experiencing the fullness of life in the moment.

All flesh will see the salvation of God. Wait for it. Live in the moment that anticipates such a promise. Be in the moment that believes such promise is possible. The point is, knowing the future makes the fullness of the present possible. That is the true essence of Advent.

~ Karoline Lewis, Luther Seminary

I believe Jesus' teaching on [His second Coming] has much more to do with how we live than 'when' this will happen. I feel certain that the Second Coming of Christ is not designed as a way of jerking the carpet out from under inconsistent and imperfect Christians. No, in a sense, I believe Jesus holds this before us as a reminder of who we are called to be and how we are to live in relationship with God and one another.

But a moment of honesty here. If humankind, if the Christian family for that matter, is to be judged on our stewardship of the Master's house as it is today, we may be in for a heap of trouble. A quick zip through any major newspaper in the US will tell you that. It tells us we are not perfect and there may be much more of a need to tend to God's world and family than ever before.

But let not the headlines drive us to despair. Mother Teresa often reminded her sisters that Christians were not called to be successful, but they were called to be faithful. The call of Jesus is not to be perfect...it is not even to have success as the world may measure it; it is, instead to be faithful—to live in a 'heavenly way,' in all times—whether they be the 'end times' or not. All Christ asks of us is that we let Him come—let "Advent" happen—in our hearts, and in doing so, we are empowered to live with our God, our world and our fellow humans in a way that will not cause us to be afraid or worried or even surprised at the Master's return—but overjoyed.

~ Rev. Dr. Russell Levenson Jr., St. Martin's Episcopal Church

Peace