

Our Service of Worship for December 12, 2021

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Westwood First Presbyterian Church

Cincinnati, OH



Welcome and

Announcements

Moment for Mission—Sharon Ulrich

Prelude: “*The First Nowell*”—arr. Michael Helman
Chancel Bells

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

Ringling of the Tower Bell

Introit: “*A Flickering Candle*”—Stephen Folkemer

** Call to Worship: Lighting the Advent Wreath—Chris, Sarah and Elise Beckman

Reader 1: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

On this third Sunday of Advent we join with the writers of Scripture to sing of hope and healing. With our hearts we praise the Lord, and we are glad because of God our Savior.

Reader 2: Healing takes many forms. People are healed from diseases, social and political injustice are corrected, even the earth itself can be restored to support new life.

Reader 1: Elizabeth recognized that Mary would give birth to a child who would save his people, and Mary sang a song of praise to God. But her song is not a lullaby to soothe people to sleep. Her song is a strong declaration of God's greatness.

Reader 2: God's greatness was shown in Christ and is still active in the world. The child of Mary brought a message of healing that continues as we follow Christ's words and actions.

Reader 1: Today we relight the first and second candles on our Advent wreath. The light of these burning candles reminds us that our waiting and dreaming can make a positive difference in our world.

Readers 2: God's desire is for healing and reconciliation. The flame of this third candle reminds that God calls us to be part of the healing of the world; that there is hope, peace and joy to be found, even in a hurting world.

Opening Prayer

** Hymn No. 31: “*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*” (all verses) *

A Time of Confession

Invitation to Confession

Prayer of Confession (unison)

Most Merciful God, we praise you for sending light into this world. We confess that we live without joy, as though the light had never defeated darkness. We confess that we ignore the Savior you sent to be among us and to live in us. We've kept the birth of your Son confined to the Christmas season and do not yearn for his coming each moment in our waiting hearts. [continued]

Forgive us for not opening our eyes to Jesus. Prepare us for His return. Help us rejoice in the light so that your grace can illuminate the darkened places of our hearts. In Jesus' name we humbly pray.

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

Assurance of God's Love and Mercy (based on 1 Thessalonians 5:23—responsive)

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your mind, body and spirit be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Come Lord Jesus. Alleluia. Amen.

May Christ's hope, peace and joy be with you, now and throughout our Advent journey.
And also with you.

** Response to God's Grace (unison)

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

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture Readings: *Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-9; Luke 3:7-20* *

Sermon: *"Rejoice!"*

Special Music: *"He Shall Feed His Flock"* and *"Come Unto Him"* (from *Messiah*)—Handel
Jean Graves, alto and Kristi Reed, soprano

Advent Affirmation of Faith (unison)

We believe that God has come to us as a little child, making our weakness his strength, securing our salvation by becoming one of us, blessing us with a steadfast savior, filling our hearts with joy to be shared with one another. We believe that God has birthed righteousness and justice into the world, giving us a law that will be written upon our hearts, making the cause of the oppressed the highest priority, declaring an everlasting reign of peace, defeating the power of pain and suffering. We believe that God calls us to participate in this reality of love, inviting us to proclaim Christ's resurrection at His Table, transforming us as disciples to go out into the world, sending us forth to announce his kingdom of peace and comfort, challenging us to see everyone as nothing less than beloved children. This we believe. This we preach. This we seek to embody in word and deed. Amen.

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 joy, and we give with joy. Joy for all you have given us; joy because of your sacred promises. Receive these generous offerings, and use them to spread your joy in our world. This we pray in that holy name above all others, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Offertory: *"Coventry Carol"*—arr. Julie Stitt

Julie Fuqua, oboe and Chancel Bells

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

[During the pause in the prayer, feel free to call out the name of someone for whom prayer is requested, or briefly, a joy or concern on your heart. The prayer concludes with the Lord's Prayer, offered in unison.]

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. 28: “*Good Christian Friends, Rejoice*” (all verses) *

Charge and Benediction

Response: “*Come, Lord Jesus*”—Anna Laura Page

Postlude: “*A Joyous Air*”—Purcell/arr. Spong

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.

REJOICE! REJOICE! EMMANUEL, SHALL COME TO THEE O ISRAEL!

Leading Worship This Morning:

Rev. Dr. Jeff Colarossi, *Pastor*

Heather MacPhail, *Organist/Director of Music Ministries*

Dale Nieman, *Lay Worship Leader*



Prayer Requests and Announcements

- ✚ December West-Fed Food Pantry: crackers cereal and canned corn
- ✚ Prayers are requested for:
 - ♥ Connie Graham and her family after the death of her mother.
 - ♥ Tom and Rita Davey, friends of Wendy Beckman.
 - ♥ Anna and Dick Rechel, who have contracted COVID.
 - ♥ Susie, a friend of the Kochheisers, who is undergoing 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.
- ✚ Flowers this morning have been donated in memory of:
 - ♥ Bob and Dorothy Greiser, by Lynn Lanman and Elizabeth Durrell
 - ♥ Howard Lapp and Edith Jondral, Inga’s sister by the Lapp and Draginoff families.
- ✚ Members have continued to return pledge cards over the past few weeks and their generous commitments are so greatly appreciated. It would be helpful to the Budget Committee to have the majority of the pledge cards submitted by the end of the week ahead so that realistic planning for the 2022 budget can begin. Thank you!
- ✚ **Monday School will conclude on Monday, Dec. 27 at 6:30pm** via Zoom, to allow more folks to take part. A new link will be sent. We will be discussing chapter 11

- ✚ **Ed Schaible would like to extend an invitation to his traditional Christmas Open House on Sunday, December 19, any time after 2:00 PM.** If you've never seen Ed's home decorated for Christmas (or even if you have), you're in for a treat!! Ed pulls out all the stops and if this doesn't get you in the holiday spirit, nothing will!
- ✚ Thanks to all who helped out with the **City Gospel Mission Christmas Store.** We eagerly anticipate partnering with them again in the coming year!
- ✚ **Today is the last day to purchase poinsettias** to decorate the sanctuary for the next few weeks. Please make checks payable to the WFPC, and give them to Lynn Lanman, along with your order form.



Hymns

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing—No. 31 (all verses)

1. Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King"
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled
Joyful all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies
With angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"
2. Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come, offspring of the Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"
3. Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die,
Born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice—No. 12 (all verses)

1. Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say: Jesus Christ was born today.
Ox and ass before him bow, and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today! Christ is born today!
2. Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;
Now ye hear of endless bliss: Jesus Christ was born for this!
He has opened heaven's door, and we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!
3. Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;
Now ye need not fear the grave: Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all to gain the everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!

Scripture Readings

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-20—A Song of Joy

¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. ¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. ¹⁷ The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing ¹⁸ as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

¹⁹ I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. ²⁰ At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-9

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me and the God of peace will be with you.

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:7-20—The Proclamation of John the Baptist

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, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³ He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

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. ¹⁹ But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

Moment for Mission—Third Sunday of Advent

Crowds were willing to journey into the desert to hear John the Baptist preach. He opens with, “*You brood of vipers.*” Now why would people traipse out into the dusty desert to hear *that*? It’s because we all thirst for the truth and want to be forgiven and transformed. John’s point is that there is more to being a Christian than merely “avoiding the wrath to come.” We are called to “bear fruits worthy of repentance.”

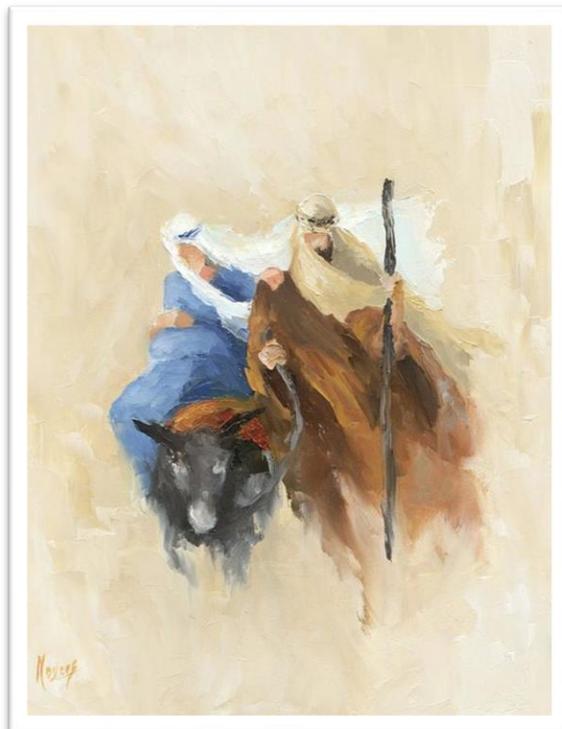
If I look at my life as a tree where’s the fruit? Is there actually any difference in how I set priorities, spend money, treat my family, and pursue my daily work? Is there? We can pose as Christians all we want but if all we are is dead wood we will be cut down will all the rest of it! And why not? The crowd says, “*Oh, that’s not good for us! What should we do?*”

John’s audience might have come out into the desert merely to avoid pain. Yet now John’s hearers are truly captivated by his message. Note that it isn’t contemporary music, stage lighting, or even dry ice that captivates them. It is his *message*. They even start to ask themselves, “Wow, could this be Messiah himself?” John quickly disabuses them. “*One who is more powerful than I is coming, and the throngs of his sandals I am not worthy to untie.*”

Having just been utterly transfixed by the man in front of them can you imagine what it must have been like to anticipate the arrival of one infinitely greater? This was good news indeed. These people knew their world was broken. They knew all too well the tremendous injustice, callousness, and selfishness that marked their culture. And now here before them was a man announcing that the transformation they so deeply longed for was coming soon.

So what’s the bottom line? For me it’s “Don’t settle for the status quo. Don’t let your life be defined by mere pain avoidance. Don’t play at being a Christian. Lean into transforming faith in every moment and in every relationship.”

~ Steve Godfrey, churchintheworld.com



Journey to Bethlehem by Mike Moyers