

# Worship Guide for December 20, 2020

## The Fourth Sunday of Advent

### *PREPARING FOR GOD'S WORD*

#### **PRELUDE**

This is the day the Lord has made. **Let us rejoice and be glad in it!**

#### **LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

Rev. David Jones

#### **Christmas Eve Service | 7:00 pm | Live streaming on Facebook**

As we have moved to virtual worship, our Christmas Eve Service will be live streamed through our Facebook page on Thursday at 7:00 pm. Members will receive a worship kit soon that includes a Christmas Eve bulletin and instructions for communion.

#### **Angel's House Gift Cards Due Tomorrow!**

Please bring your gift cards to the Church Office by tomorrow at noon. We have received over \$1,600 worth of gift cards so far! Thank you for your generosity!

**Thanksgiving** This week we highlight the staff of Newnan Presbyterian Church. We are grateful for their dedication and service. Barbara Kookogey and Karen Geeter oversee the operation of the preschool staff and children, truly responding to God's call in their lives. Karen's service to our congregation "crosses the bridge" as she also serves as the church's Financial Secretary. Cliff Brock has blessed us with his many musical talents and we are glad that he is here. Associate Pastor Tyler Brock brings to the staff levity, social media and digital acumen. Our Church Secretary Beth Royal enjoys serving the staff and congregation. And me – your pastor – I am honored to be your pastor and the Head of Staff of these great people.

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

#### **LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH**

The Eriksen Family

Isaiah spoke to a people called chosen, to a tribe called Israel, with a light of hope.  
Gabriel came to a town called Nazareth, to a girl called Mary, with a light of joy.  
Mary went to a place called Bethlehem, to a stable called a nursery, with a light of love.  
As we light our fourth Advent candle,  
**we rejoice with Mary, for Love as flesh.**  
Come now, O Child of Mary.  
**Come now, O Prince of Love.**

#### **CAROL 85 Light One Candle to Watch for the Messiah, v. 4** Erik Swindlehurst, Bell Tree

*Light four candles to watch for Messiah:*

*let the light banish darkness.*

*He is coming; tell the glad tidings.*

*Let your light be shining.*

#### **CALL TO CONFESSION**

Let us confess our sins to the One whose mercy endures from generation to generation.

## PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Faithful God, we know that you are always there to guide us,  
yet we often make plans without listening to you  
and discover that our human agendas  
can drown out our ability to hear your will for us.  
We repent of these faults and turn to you in love.  
Forgive our offenses and pardon our sins,  
that our lives may magnify your holy name forever...

*We keep a moment of silence for personal confession.*

## ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Sisters and brothers, by the faith of Christ, your sins are forgiven. Blessed be the God of our salvation, whose mercy is everlasting. **Thanks be to God: we are forgiven!**

## RECEIVING THE PEACE

Isaiah reminds us a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. The peace of Christ be with you. **And also with you!**

## A TIME FOR YOUNG DISCIPLES

Rev. Darcie Jones

**GLORIA 133 Angels We Have Heard on High**, *refrain only*

*Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

*Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

## LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

### PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Rev. Tyler Brock

Astonishing God, send your Holy Spirit upon us as we await the coming of your Son. Fill us with good things that we may conceive your reign on earth and glorify you according to your Word; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

### THE GOSPEL READING | Luke 1:26-38 | The Birth of Jesus Foretold

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup> 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.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## SERMON

### The Subjunctive Space

Luke opens his gospel prior to the telling of today's passage by saying that the author intends to tell an orderly account of the coming of Jesus Christ. What follows is the account of Zechariah, a priest of God, who is visited by the angel, Gabriel, and told that his wife, Elizabeth, will bear a child. Zechariah is perplexed by this statement and in bewilderment says that both he and his wife are too old to have children. Zechariah is punished by becoming mute until such time as his wife has their child. Elizabeth becomes pregnant, goes into seclusion, and breathes a sigh of relief that the Lord has looked favorably upon her and taken away her disgrace from her previous inability to bear children. Zechariah and Elizabeth will of course name their son, John, who is the baptizer. Luke's gospel account is the only one that relates the story of Elizabeth and Mary, who are relatives and become pregnant with sons, who are related and tied in their future service to God.

Luke shifts from the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth to describe the passage that we read today. Gabriel visits Mary and declares that she is favored by God. Gabriel tells Mary that she will conceive a child and bear a son named Jesus. Of course, Mary is incredulous about what Gabriel is telling her. Imagine Mary's confusion that she is being told how God's favor has translated into her bearing this magnificent child. We could also potentially hear the shock of Mary that an angel is visiting her. Zechariah is an older priest who has presumably served God for a majority of his life, so an angel's visit that tells him he is favored might not feel nearly as unexpected. But Mary is a young girl of lowly means, there is little in her mind that indicates why she would have been chosen as the earthly mother of Jesus.

Gabriel appears to sense Mary's confusion and perhaps the fear regarding the news, and assures her that the impossible is nothing for God. While Zechariah's long tenure as a priest should prepare him for the idea that God works wonders, Mary has no such experience. And so, despite her questioning of Gabriel's story, she is not punished as Zechariah was. Instead, Gabriel treats her more kindly before she relents with the statement, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." There are many ways to read Mary's response. It could be that she is willingly following what she has been told. She could be heavily burdened by an overwhelming blessing that she is given. She could be grieving, but passively following along with a plan that places altogether too much on her shoulders.

Whatever we make of Mary's statement, we know that she obeys and participates in the holy conception of Jesus and the inbreaking of God into her own life. Luke allows us to witness a joyful moment of fulfillment within the private life of Mary, where she steps from a normal life into the realm of the holy story of Jesus Christ. We are all aware how the people who find themselves in Jesus's story find extraordinary circumstances and possibilities around them. While she has been assured that Jesus will go on to have a great life and we are aware that we acknowledge him the Messiah promised by God, in this moment, Mary has nothing more than faith of what will be and what is to come.

We cannot fully understand Mary's predicament, because we know the story from beginning to end. We know about the birth story that we will be celebrating in a few short days and we know the crucifixion and the resurrection. Our knowledge spans the whole of the story, and therefore, it is difficult for us to envision that truly baffling space where Mary resides in this moment.

That is not to say that we know nothing of what Mary is going through. In our own times, we wake up daily to news that is both surprising, unexpected, maddening, or crushing. In the last week, parents have had to navigate the ever-changing nature of school closures and COVID exposures. I have spoken with parents who had been told that their high school was closing due to a large number of students and faculty that had to quarantine. I had a week planned out with our high school student that was thrown off completely by a tweet on Tuesday morning, informing us that in-school students would be virtual until further notice. There are parents who sent children to school in the morning, only to have them return home before lunchtime when

their child was sent home off of a potential exposure. We have our own space where each day may come with unique and unprecedented challenges.

No matter what happens during our days, we can be assured that our Lord will accompany us in each of the steps that are in front of us. We might hear the same words spoken to us each morning, which is God telling us, “greeting, favored ones! The Lord is with you.” Because much like the girl whose life was suddenly changed by Gabriel’s visit, we may feel the difficulty of the expectations that burden each of us and sense that shame and self-doubt will creep in and prey upon our mental well-being. Nothing may feel normal or expected. Yet, just like Mary, we may face each of the challenges with the same sense of joy and fear and brimming possibility.

Our God does not promise that our days will happen exactly as we planned. We may not be worry free or protected from the nature of sin in the world.

Regardless, may we each face the unexpected and the challenges and the possibilities with the same courage as Mary, saying “here am I, the servant of the Lord... let it be with me according to your word.” We are not mindlessly obedient in our participation. We would be actively participating in the inbreaking of God’s miracle, God’s majesty, and God’s justice in the world.

*A moment of silent reflection follows the sermon.*

**SERMON CAROL 144** In the Bleak Midwinter, vv. 1 & 2

*In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan;  
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;  
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,  
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

*Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;  
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign:  
in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed  
the Lord God incarnate, Jesus Christ.*

## ***RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD***

### **AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

### **SPECIAL MUSIC**

What Child is This?  
Alexander Rice, soloist

W. Chatterton Dix

*What Child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?*

*This, this is Christ, the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing:  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud, the Babe, the Son of Mary!*

*Why lies He in such mean estate, where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.*

*So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh, come, peasant, king to own Him.  
The King of kings salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone Him.*

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Maria Smith & Kevin Werner in the birth of their daughter, Lillian Marie Werner, last Monday  
Helen Faye Pope is in rehabilitation at Sanders Terrace at Wesley Woods  
Martin & Sharon Harmon

Let us join our voices with Mary, who celebrates God's greatness  
and sings of God's blessing for all who are poor and oppressed.  
Eternal God, we pray for the world, that our warring ways may be overturned, even now,  
through the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ; for nothing is impossible with you.  
We pray for the mission of your church, that we may proclaim the good news of the age  
as we rejoice in the gift of our Savior. We pray for all who suffer, that we may feed the hungry  
and lift up the lowly through the power of your holy and life-giving Spirit. We pray for your  
creation, that we may safeguard its well-being from generation to generation to your honor and  
glory. We remember before you those who have died and pray for those who will die today,  
that they may rest with you eternally in your kingdom where there is no end. Through Christ,  
with Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, we magnify you, almighty God,  
forever and ever and pray together the words Jesus taught us to pray, saying...

## **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.**

## **CAROL 144 In the Bleak Midwinter, vv. 3 & 4**

*Angels and archangels may have gathered there;  
cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;  
but his mother only, in her maiden bliss,  
worshiped the beloved with a kiss.*

*What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
if I were a wise man, I would do my part;  
yet what I can I give him: give my heart.*

## **BENEDICTION**

May the Christ who walks on wounded feet walk with you along the way.  
May the Christ who serves with wounded hands stretch out your hands to serve.  
May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart cause your heart to love.  
May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet,  
and may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you. **Amen.**

## **POSTLUDE**

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## GIVING REPORT

	<b>Giving 2020</b>	<b>Giving 2019</b>
<b>Pledged</b>	<b>\$384,724.27</b>	<b>\$374,875.23</b>
<b>Unpledged</b>	<b>\$29,594.00</b>	<b>\$64,466.49</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$414,318.27</b>	<b>\$439,341.72</b>

Members and visitors alike, please plan to give today in whatever way you are able, either online through Realm, through your bank account, using the QR code below, or by mailing a check to the church. Thank you for your generosity.



### **Holiday Office Hours**

Dec 21 and 22 | 8:00 am-3:00 pm

Dec 23 | 8:00 am-Noon

*Closed Christmas Eve & Christmas Day*

Dec 28, Dec 29 and Dec 30 | 8:00 am-3:00 pm

Dec 31 | 8:00 am-Noon

*Closed New Year's Day*