



First Presbyterian Church

SERVICE FOR THE LORD'S DAY

December 17th, 2023

Third Sunday of Advent



Photo: Steve Attwood

“Heart, what a rare bird you are...” -Rumi

The ABC's of Advent
A Christmas Pageant

Order of Worship

Prelude

Noël on “Where Go These Happy Shepherds?”
Bruce Stevens, organ

Claude Balbastre

Welcome and Announcements

Rev. Amy Starr Redwine

Opening Prayer

*Hymn 133

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

ADESTE FIDELES

Reader: Fiona Nicholson

A is for Advent. Advent means, “arrival” or “coming.” During Advent, we remember that God comes into the world every day, in ways that often surprise us.

B is for Baby. Everyone was expecting God to come into the world with might and power. Instead, the angel Gabriel told Mary to expect something quite different, telling her:

“The Lord has blessed you in a special way. God is with you! You have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a baby and call his name Jesus.” (Luke 1:28-33)

Reader: Jamie Scott

C is for Confidence. Even though she was surprised, even though she was a little scared, Mary was confident - she had faith. She knew God would be with her.

“I serve the Lord,” she said to Gabriel. “Let it happen just as you say.” (Luke 1:38)

D is for Donkey. A donkey carried the family on their long journey to Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph had to travel 107 miles along the Jordan River to get from Nazareth to Bethlehem - that’s the same distance between Richmond, where we live, and Washington, D.C.!

Reader: Marlo Woodfin

E is for Exhausted. That’s how everyone must have felt when they arrived, after three days of nonstop walking! That might be how we felt when we arrived in worship today - with all the cares and worries we carry, with all the ways we have fallen short of what God wants for us - and for the world. Through our prayers, we recognize two things: that God loves us even when we make mistakes, and that God helps us to grow and learn from our mistakes. Let’s pray together.

Prayer of Confession

God, we don’t always do what’s right. We forget. We make mistakes. We mess up. When those things happen, help us to come to you. We know you love us no matter what. We know you will always forgive us, and help us to be better.

Hymn 121 (vv. 1, 4)

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

ST. LOUIS

***Please rise in body or in spirit.**

Reader: James Raggi

F is for Family. Mary and Joseph and their new baby Jesus created a new family, one that would bless the whole world.

“While Joseph and Mary were there, the time came for the child to be born. Mary gave birth to her first baby: a boy. She wrapped him in large strips of cloth. Then she placed him in a manger. That’s because there was no guest room where they could stay.” (Luke 2:6-8)

Readers: Penelope & Augusta Rudd

G is for the Good News about to be shared with all the earth.

“There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God’s angel stood among them and God’s glory blazed around them. The shepherds were terrified. The angel said, “Don’t be afraid. I’m here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David’s town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you’re to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket lying in a manger.”

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God’s praises: “Glory to God in the heavenly heights. Peace to all people on earth.” (Luke 2:10-14)

Hymn 119

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

MENDELSSOHN

Reader: Brooke White, Candle-Lighter: Lawson White

H is for Hope. Now we light the Advent candle of Hope. Hope is knowing good news is coming, even when things look bad. Jesus is the source of our hope.

I is for Immanuel, which means “God is with us.” To remind people that God was with them, the prophet Isaiah used the word Immanuel long before Jesus was born.

Reader: Emmett Sisler, Candle-Lighter: Mike Sisler

J is for Joy. Now we light the Advent candle of Joy. The birth of Jesus gives us joy. Joy is a kind of happiness that comes from God. No one can take it away from us, and we can share it with everyone.

Hymn 134

“Joy to the World”

ANTIOCH

Reader: Norah Andrzejewski

K is for King. Though Jesus would be King, he was not the kind of king people were used to. Most kings are born in palaces, surrounded by servants. Jesus was born in a stable, surrounded by smelly animals. Most kings rule with power and fear. Jesus rules with mercy and love.

L is for Love. Next week, we’ll light the Advent candle of Love. Jesus showed us what love looks like: feeding the hungry, helping the sick, visiting the lonely, welcoming strangers.

Readers: Madelyn Chewning, Emory Ruffner, & Frances Reynolds

M is for Magi. Magi is a word that means “wise ones.” These people came looking for “the child who has been born King of the Jewish people.”

N is for New Star. The wise ones saw a new star in the sky and followed it to Jerusalem. They expected this King to be born in a big city. But, like everyone else, they were surprised. They found him in the small town of Bethlehem.

O is for Offering. The Wise Ones gave gifts to the baby. We can offer our gifts every day. We give our time, talents, and treasures to God. Together we pray that, as a church, we take good care of everything God entrusts to us. So we share our gifts now.

Offertory

People, Look East
Chancel Choir

arr. Robert Lau

*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*

*Birds, though you long have ceased to build,
guard the nest that must be filled.
Even the hour when wings are frozen
God for fledging time has chosen.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the Bird, is on the way.*

*Stars, keep watch. When night is dim
one more light the bowl shall brim,
shining beyond the frosty weather,
bright as the sun and moon together.
[People look east and sing today:]
Love, the Star, is on the way.*

*Angels, announce with shouts of mirth
him 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.*

Reader: Zoë Mintz, Candle-Lighter: George Redwine

P is for Peace. Now we light the Advent candle of Peace. Peace means more than just “not fighting.” It means working together to make sure everyone has what they need.

Q is for Quiet. We begin a time of prayer in quiet, allowing God to speak to us.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and of the People

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.

Reader: Robbie Forston

R is for Rejoice. Jesus told stories about things and people who were lost and then found. It feels lonely to be lost. He wants us to pay attention to who’s missing, and go find them. When lost people are found, we rejoice! We celebrate and welcome them back.

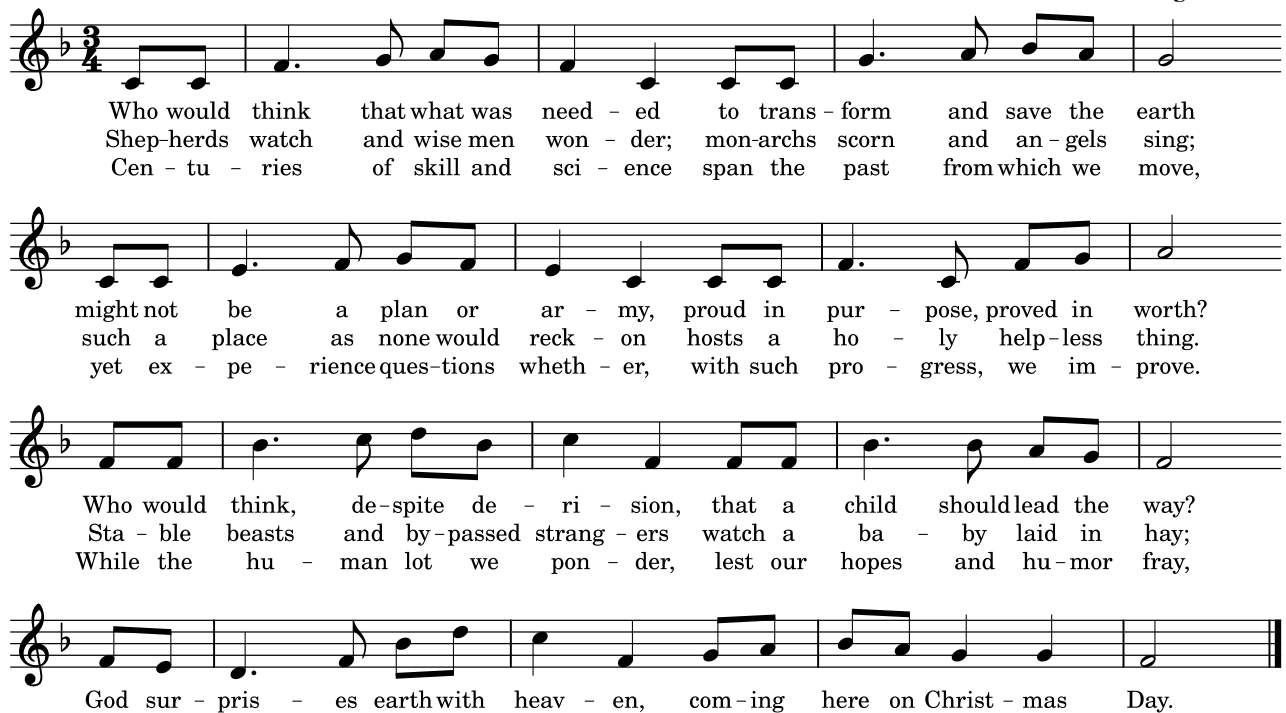
Reader: Anne Ryland Brown

S is for Surprising. Jesus was always surprising people. He came as a baby instead of a warrior. He lived simply instead of showing off his power. He spent time with people that almost everyone else ignored and overlooked. Even all these years later, Jesus can still surprise us today, bringing healing and hope when we least expect them.

Hymn

“Who Would Think That What Was Needed”

sung to PROMISE



Who would think that what was need - ed to trans - form and save the earth
 Shep - herds watch and wise men won - der; mon - archs scorn and an - gels sing;
 Cen - tu - ries of skill and sci - ence span the past from which we move,

might not be a plan or ar - my, proud in pur - pose, proved in worth?
 such a place as none would reck - on hosts a ho - ly help - less thing.
 yet ex - pe - rience ques - tions wheth - er, with such pro - gress, we im - prove.

Who would think, de - spite de - ri - sion, that a child should lead the way?
 Sta - ble beasts and by - passed strang - ers watch a ba - by laid in hay;
 While the hu - man lot we pon - der, lest our hopes and hu - mor fray,

God sur - pris - es earth with heav - en, com - ing here on Christ - mas Day.

Reader: Carolina Scott

T is for Table. Jesus was a carpenter, and he probably built lots of tables. Once he began his ministry, he ate at tables with all kinds of people: rich and poor, young and old, friends and enemies. Jesus shows us that we can make room at our tables for everyone.

Reader: Avery Wiltshire

U is for Us. Jesus came for all of us. Every person here, and everyone out there, and everyone you'll ever meet, is precious in God's sight.

V is for Victory. Jesus was victorious over death, showing us that nothing - not even death - can separate us from God's love.

Reader: Nancy Bain

W is for Waiting. We know that God comes into our world each day in surprising ways. Still, we wait for the time when Jesus will return to set everything right. We wait in hope for a time when we can shout:

“Look! God has moved into the neighborhood. God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death, no more sadness, no more crying or pain. God is making everything new!” (Revelation 21:3-5)

X is for Christ. X is the Greek letter Chi, the first letter in the word “Christ.” The X is one of the most ancient symbols of Christianity. People have been using the letter X to stand for Christ for centuries.

Readers: Morayo & Setemi Taiwo

Y is for Yours. You have heard this story, and now it's yours. What will you do with it? Will you keep it to yourself, or share it? Will you put it back on the shelf until next year, or let it change your life? The choice is yours.

Z is for Zero. While there are a lot of surprises for us in the advent and Christmas stories, for God, there are zero surprises. God knows each of our stories, and wants to be part of them.

“Yes, I'm on my way!” says the Lord. “I'll be there soon! I'm A to Z, the First and Last, the Beginning and the Ending.” (Revelation 22:12-13)

On the first day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
and praise you Christ the King!

On the second day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
Immanuel, we praise you Christ the King!

On the third day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
God with us, Immanuel, we praise you Christ the King!

On the fourth day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
Bright Morning Star, God with us, Immanuel,
we praise you Christ the King!

On the fifth day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
Prince of Peace!
Bright Morning Star, God with us, Immanuel,
we praise you Christ the King!

On the sixth day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace!
Bright Morning Star, God with us, Immanuel,
we praise you Christ the King!

On the seventh day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
Almighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace!
Bright Morning Star, God with us, Immanuel,
we praise you Christ the King!

On the eighth day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace!
Bright Morning Star, God with us, Immanuel,
we praise you Christ the King!

On the ninth day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting
Father, Prince of Peace!
Bright Morning Star, God with us, Immanuel,
we praise you Christ the King!

On the tenth day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
Lord of Lords,
Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting
Father, Prince of Peace!
Bright Morning Star, God with us, Immanuel,
we praise you Christ the King!

On the eleventh day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
King of Kings, Lord of Lords,
Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting
Father, Prince of Peace!
Bright Morning Star, God with us, Immanuel,
we praise you Christ the King!

On the twelfth day of Christmas,
we gather now to sing
Alpha and Omega, King of Kings, Lord of Lords,
Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting
Father, Prince of Peace!
Bright Morning Star, God with us, Immanuel,
we praise you Christ the King!

Blessing and Benediction

Cate Henderson

Postlude

Toccata on “The First Nowell”

Gordon Phillips

The flowers in the Sanctuary are given in memory of Anne and John Woodfin Sr. by Charlotte and Jack Woodfin.

The flowers in the Sanctuary were arranged by Sara Crump. The flowers in the Memorial Corridor were arranged by Kathy Watson.