



First Presbyterian Church of Athens

In response to God's grace, the mission of First Presbyterian Church is to create a community where people seek the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rejoice in worship, and go forth sharing the love of Christ with Athens and the world!

December 23, 2018
10:00 a.m.
Fourth Sunday of Advent

GATHERING IN THE NAME OF GOD

Welcome to all who are worshipping with us. As we enter a holy space this morning, **please silence your cell phone**. The nursery is available downstairs during both services. Consult an usher if you need a personal hearing device, large-print bulletin or large-print hymnal.

The congregation is invited to speak or sing the liturgy in **bold** type.

Greeting

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Prelude

ST. LOUIS: Contemplation

A. D. Miller

Words of Welcome and Concerns of the Church

Moment for Mission Christmas Joy Offering

Jim Scanlon

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Polly Erickson

Melinda, Don, Maggie, and Cate DeMaria

Congregational Response

VENI EMMANUEL

**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.**

Please sign and pass the Fellowship Pad, making note of new and old friends, and check in online.

*Hymn 41

O Come, All Ye Faithful

ADESTE FIDELES

From its Roman Catholic origins, the 18th-century hymn O Come, All Ye Faithful has spread to world-wide use by many denominations. Once popular with a wide range of hymn texts, this tune is now firmly associated with this Christmas text from which it is named.

*Those who are able may stand.

***Call to Confession**

***Prayer of Confession**

God of the midnight manger, we confess that we have been complicit in the frenzy of consumerism, the tension of gift giving, the pressure of decorated perfection. With Christmas two days away, we need to have our souls restored and spirits refreshed, so that the doors we have closed may be opened for all seeking a place for peace to be born in our world.

***Silent Prayer**

Lord, have mercy. **Amen.**

***Assurance of Pardon**

***Congregational Response**

Hymn 3, Stanza 1

**Comfort, comfort you my people,
tell of peace, thus says our God;
comfort those who sit in darkness
bowed beneath oppression's load.
Speak you to Jerusalem
of the peace that waits for them;
tell them that their sins I cover,
and their warfare now is over.**

Worshippers may greet each other by saying, "The peace of Christ be with you," and responding, "And also with you."

***The Peace**

Since God has forgiven us in Christ, let us forgive one another. The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.
And also with you.
Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you.

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

Congregational Prayer for Illumination

Hymn 68, Stanza 3

**O Jesus, while the star of grace impels us on to seek your face,
let not our slothful hearts refuse the guidance of your light to use.**

First Lesson

Psalm 146:1-10, page 570

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

The anthem is a text by Jean Mauburn (1460-1503) set to music by contemporary American composer Bruce Neswick. Neswick has a custom of writing a new carol to send out with his Christmas cards each year. This anthem is one of those pieces.

Anthem

Dost Thou in a Manger Lie

Bruce Neswick

Dost thou in a manger lie, who hast all created,
stretching infant hands on high, Savior long awaited?
If a monarch, where thy state? Where thy court on thee to wait?
Sceptor, crown, and sphere?
Here no regal pomp we see, nought but need and penury:
why thus cradled here?
"For the world a love supreme brought me to this stable;
all creation to redeem I alone am able.
By this lowly birth of mine, sinner, riches shall be thine,
matchless gifts and free;
willingly this yoke I take, and this sacrifice I make,
heaping joys for thee."
Christ we praise with voices bold, laud and honor raising;
for these mercies manifold join the hosts in praising:
Father, glory be to thee for the wondrous charity
of thy Son, our Lord.
Better witness to thy worth, purer praise than ours on earth,
angels' songs afford.

Second Lesson Luke 2:1-7, page 935
This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon The Story in Song: O Little Town of Bethlehem
Dr. Bruce Lancaster

RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

***Hymn 44** O Little Town of Bethlehem ST. LOUIS

***Affirmation of Faith** from A Declaration of Faith – PCUS 1977
God sent the promised Deliverer to his people.

Jesus, the long-expected Savior, came into the world as a child, descended from David, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of Mary, a virgin.

We affirm that Jesus was born of woman as is every child, yet born of God's power as was no other child.

In the person and work of Jesus, God himself and a human life are united but not confused, distinguished but not separated.

The coming of Jesus was itself the coming of God's promised rule.

Through his birth, life, death, and resurrection, he brings about the relationship between God and humanity that God always intended.

Prayers of the People 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.

Presentation of Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory Improvisation on ST. LOUIS John Coble

***Doxology** Hymn 592

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise him, all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

***Prayer of Dedication**

SENDING IN THE NAME OF GOD

***Hymn 38** It Came Upon the Midnight Clear CAROL

***Benediction**

***Congregational Response** VENI EMMANUEL, refrain
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

***Postlude** In dulci jubilo Johann Sebastian Bach

The Affirmation of Faith is an excerpt from a contemporary statement of faith which the church adopted as "a reliable aid for Christian study, liturgy, and inspiration."

The "it" of It Came Upon the Midnight Clear, by a Unitarian minister, does not refer to the birth of Jesus, but to "that glorious song of old," the angelic tidings of peace on earth. Another stanza not found in our hymnal laments how often the noise of human strife has obscured that message.

Texts and music for hymns and sung responses reprinted under OneLicense.net #A-714861

A special word of welcome to our guests: thank you for joining us for worship this morning. Please fill out the fellowship pad so that we may be in touch. We are delighted you are here and look forward to seeing you again.

Nurseries for infants and toddlers, available from 8:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., are located next to the Children's Ministry Suite and are accessible down the stairs in the Atrium and through the glass door.

To pick up your child from Children's Church after the 11:00 a.m. service, please go to the Children's Ministry Suite located down the stairs in the Atrium, through the glass door to the right.

NOTES ON THE SERVICE

WORSHIP LEADERS

Liturgist

Carol Strickland

Lay Reader

Katie Sue Martin-Williams

USHERS

Jimbo LaBoon (head),

Reid Bangle, Dick Ferguson, Pratt Ferguson,
Wallace Trapnell, Bo Thurston

GREETERS

Kathy Bangle, Susan Landrum,
Tom Landrum, Faye Marshall

FELLOWSHIP HOSTS: Ann Dunn,
Diane Hartzell

SUNDAY MORNING MANAGER

Paulo Santos

FLOWERS

The Sanctuary flowers are given to the glory of God.

TO AID IN WORSHIP

If you need to leave the sanctuary during the service, a live video feed is available in the Atrium.

Available in the narthex or from an usher:

- **Personal hearing receivers** usable anywhere in the sanctuary
- **Large-print** hymnals, Bibles, bulletins, and hymnsheets
- **Sermons** from the previous six weeks

CONGREGATIONAL CARE

Prayer requests can be submitted to the church office, 706-543-4338, by the Prayer Request link on our church website (firstpresathens.org) or on the prayer cards in the fellowship pads.

One Service, 10:00 a.m. December 30 & January 6

For two more Sundays we will have one service at 10:00 a.m. and Sunday School will not meet.

Advent & Christmas Sermon Series

For this Advent and Christmas season, our sermon series is built around the theme, "The Story in Song." Each Sunday, we will be led by a hymn that moves us through the season and brings to mind the story we love to tell.

4th Sunday of Advent, Today, 10:00 a.m., "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

Christmas Eve, December 24, 6:00 & 8:00 p.m., "Silent Night"

1st Sunday after Christmas Day, December 30, 10:00 a.m., "Song of Simeon"

ANNOUNCEMENTS

HOLIDAY BENEVOLENCE MARKET Through December 31

“Shopping lists” for local non-profit agencies are available in the Narthex and church office. Checks can be received until December 31.

BRINGING CHRISTMAS CHEER

Thanks to your generosity, 107 baskets were given to Casa de Amistad, 105 angels were adopted from the Salvation Army Angel Tree, approximately \$5,000 has been given so far through the Holiday Benevolence Market, meals were delivered on Thanksgiving Day, and more will be delivered on Christmas Day and New Year’s Day for Meals on Wheels. What a loving congregation!

FOOD SUNDAY

January 6

On Sunday, January 6 we will collect items for the Athens-Area Emergency Food Bank. This month they are requesting **cold breakfast cereal and saltine crackers**. Thank you for donating 542 items in December!

2019-20 WEEKDAY SCHOOL

Registration Begins January 15

Please call our director, Elaine Johnson, at 706-206-8180 to schedule a tour. Our Weekday School is celebrating 52 years of serving Athens children, ages infant through 5 years.

AUCTION DONATIONS NEEDED

Can you donate an item, service, or experience for the silent auction at our Mardi Gras Mission Gala next March? Maybe a treasure in your attic, an hour of professional services, cooking for a dinner party, or a weekend at your vacation home? Donation forms are online and in the church office.

2018 CONTRIBUTIONS

Those who wish to make a contribution to the church before the end of the year please note the following: for tax purposes the contribution must be claimed in the year in which it is delivered. One exception is a check, which is deductible in the year it is mailed (and postmarked) even though it is received by the church early in the new year.

COMMITMENT SUNDAY UPDATE

Thank you to all who have made a financial commitment for 2019. We depend on the generosity of everyone to support our ministries and missions. If you have not yet made your commitment, please do so by the end of the year so the Session can plan the 2019 budget. You may turn in your pledge in the offering plate, in the church office, or online at firstpresathens.org/home/giving.

Called Congregational Meeting

January 6, 11:00 a.m.

The Session has called a Congregational meeting for January 6 to act on a recommendation from the Pastor Nominating Committee. There will be one worship service at 10:00 a.m. with the meeting immediately following the service. A brochure with information about the Senior Pastor/Head of Staff candidate to be presented by the PNC will be available on January 6.

A very special invitation to join us on Christmas Eve:

Monday, December 24

Child-Friendly Service, 4:00 p.m.

Candlelight Services, 6:00 & 8:00 p.m.

Nursery will only be provided at 6:00 p.m.

Please plan to join us on this most holy of nights as we celebrate the birth of our Savior.

SUNDAY SCHOOL RESUMES JANUARY 13

Sunday School Classes are available for all ages and meet 9:45-10:40 a.m.

SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN

Children's Ministry Suite • Infants - 5th Grade

Director of Children's Ministries: Natalie Bishop

Nursery Volunteer & Staff Coordinator: Jennifer Abbott

Infants • Nursery Baby Room

Room Lead: Rita Raines

Toddlers - Preschoolers • Nursery Playroom

Room Lead: Mary Smith

Our toddler and preschooler curriculum is Group Publishing's Play-n-Worship. It is filled with music, activities, and storyboards that encourage little ones to interact with Bible stories.

Pre-Kindergarten - 5th Grade

Our elementary aged children will experience Godly Play during Sunday School. Godly Play helps children to explore their faith through story, to gain religious language, and to grow their spiritual experience through wonder and play.

The children will begin all together each Sunday morning in the Children's Ministry Suite with Holy Moly (short animated Bible Story videos). Immediately following Holy Moly, the children will head to their Godly Play Rooms.

Pre-Kindergarten - Kindergarten • Room 126 in Children's Ministry Suite

1st, 2nd, 3rd Grade • Children's Ministry Suite

4th Grade - 5th Grade • Godly Play Room #1, Tinsley Stern Building (across from library)

Godly Play Guides: Jennifer Abbott, Natalie Bishop, Jody Corry, Greta Covington, Susan Ferguson, Madie Fischetti, Julie Hayes, Denise Horton, Sydney Jackson, Matt Jones, Mary Elizabeth McConnell, Carmen Meadows, Heather Roberts, Dan Trier, Gail Wilfong

SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR ADULTS

Christian Issues • Room 308

Study of the book, Mark: Follow Me by James Hoover.

Coordinator: Sandy Boyles

Inquirers • Moses Waddel Room

Thoughtful introspection and lively group discussion covering contemporary issues and daily Christian living, with guest speakers or DVD studies.

- January 13 - LaTrena Stokes, Scholarship Program Manager at the Jeannette Rankin Foundation
- January 20 - Mark Farmer, speaking on "The Population Boom and the Future of Humanity"

Facilitators: Carl Bergmann, Carla Buss

Living on a Prayer • Room 303

Devotionals based on scripture, led by different class members. Sandwich project on first Sundays.

Coordinator: Karen Burg

New Voices • Room 310

Study of the book, Radical Forgiveness: God's Call to Unconditional Love by Brian Zahnd.

Led by: Lewis Hudgins, Christine Register

W. D. Hooper • Room 309

Study of Romans with other books of the New Testament to follow.

Led by: Richard Stone

Wayne F. Middendorf Men's Bible Class

Bride's Room, Tinsley Stern

Study of the Joseph saga, Genesis 37-50.

Teacher: John Kipp

Women's Bible Class • Room 301

Study of Hebrews.

Teacher: Wanda Wilcox

SUNDAYS in The PIT

Director of Youth Ministries: Kim Ness

College Interns: Nettie Jester & Kathryn Kent

The youth are fortunate to have their own special space, lovingly called "The PIT," located on the basement level. The PIT features small group break-out rooms, a kitchen, pool tables, and comfortable couches to just hang out.

SUNDAY MORNINGS 9:45 - 10:40 a.m.

All youth grades 6-12 are invited to join us for a time of fellowship and devotion in The PIT. Each month, a different member of the congregation will lead a 3-week series on topics ranging from the Old Testament to Disney movies!

Confirmation Class, open to 9th graders, also meets during Sunday School in the Staff Conference Room. This year, we will be using the new Presbyterian curriculum called, "Big God Big Questions."

SUNDAY EVENINGS

On Sunday evenings, we come together to explore our faith through activities focused on mission, discipleship, and lots of fun!

THIS WEEK

Sunday, December 23 - 4th Sunday of Advent

10:00 a.m. Service, Dr. Bruce Lancaster preaching, No Sunday School

10:00 a.m. A Very Merry Children's Church, Children's Ministry Suite

11:05 a.m. Fellowship, Atrium

Monday, December 24 - Church Office Closed for Christmas Holiday

4:00 p.m. Child-Friendly Service

6:00 p.m. Candlelight Service, Nursery provided

8:00 p.m. Candlelight Service, Nursery will not be provided

Tuesday, December 25 - Church Office Closed for Christmas Holiday

10:00 a.m. Christmas Meals on Wheels Delivery, Council on Aging, 135 Hoyt St.

Sunday, December 30 - 1st Sunday after Christmas

10:00 a.m. Service, Dr. Carol Strickland preaching, No Sunday School

LOOKING AHEAD

December 31- Church Office Closed for New Year's Holiday

January 1 - Church Office Closed for New Year's Holiday

New Year's Day Meals on Wheels Delivery

January 2 - Church Office Opens at 10:00 a.m.

January 6 - One Service, 10:00 a.m., No Sunday School

Called Congregational Meeting, 11:00 a.m.

January 9 - Fellowship@First: Pizza Night

Bookless Book Group

January 16 - Wed@First Programs Begin

January 20 - Ecumenical Martin Luther King, Jr. Service, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, 5:00 p.m.

January 21 - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service

January 23 - Bookless Book Group

January 27 - Congregational Meeting and Lunch

February 3 - Youth Sunday

Souper Bowl of Caring

February 6 - Fellowship@First: Pizza Night



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SESSION

Bruce Lancaster, Moderator Richard Lane, Clerk of Session
Carol Strickland, Associate Pastor

CLASS OF 2018

Joe Attaway
David Cole
Jason Doornbos
Sue Gray
Mark Harrison
Denise Horton
Christine Register
Arlene Shirley
Harry Shuford
Richard Stone

CLASS OF 2019

Robbie Bryan
Greta Terrell Covington
DeeAnn Cox
Mary Havick
Bob Glasscock
Joe Hermanowicz
Richard Lane
Mary Peace
Lawton Stephens
Dan Trier

CLASS OF 2020

Jeff Bangle
Meghan Bawcum
Bob Burton
Julie Hayes
Sydney Jackson
Avery McLean
Jeanne Nadenicek
Carl Nichols
Tom Reigle
Judy Scanlon

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH STAFF

Dr. Bruce Lancaster, Interim Senior Pastor
Dr. Carol Strickland, Associate Pastor
Dr. John Kipp, Parish Associate
The Reverend Bob Googe, Parish Associate
Dr. John Coble, Director of Music and Organist
Mrs. Kim Ness, Director of Youth Ministries
Mrs. Natalie Bishop, Director of Children's Ministries
Mrs. Elaine Johnson, Director of Weekday School
Mr. Roger Burbage, Church Administrator
Mrs. Lucy Bell Johnson, Administrative Assistant for
Congregational Care & Membership
Mrs. Nan Thomas, Communications Specialist
Mrs. Jennifer Sunderlin, Receptionist/Administrative Assistant
Mrs. Laura McHugh, Accountant
Mrs. Tiffany Greene, Weekday School Administrative Assistant
Ms. Jennifer Abbott, Nursery Volunteer & Staff Coordinator
Mrs. Charlotte Chromiak, Children's Music Assistant
Mr. Willie "Buc" Collins, Sexton
Mrs. Madeline Van Dyck, Parish Nurse

COLLEGE INTERNS

Ms. Nettie Jester, Youth Ministry
Ms. Pavani Gadde, Website Technician

WADDEL FELLOWS

Ms. Kathryn Kent, Youth Ministry
Ms. Annabel McSpadden, Congregational Care

**PLEASE SEE FIRSTPRESATHENS.ORG
FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.**