

First Church Advent 2023

Waiting
Preparing
Singing

First Sunday of Advent: December 3, 2023
Waiting: Hope

Prelude: How Great Thou Art

Song: While We are Waiting Come

Welcome & Announcements

Offering

Vision Statement

Growing into God's joyful, beloved community and cultivating love, peace and justice in East Garfield Park, Chicago and beyond.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

One: We wait... With each second, with every hour.

All: We wait... Through each day, through each season.

One: We wait... God's day is coming.

All: We wait... God's work will be done.

One: Like a burning candle that stands watch through the night,

All: We wait.

Prayer of Confession - Unison

Like farmers watching the land after a planting, we are expectant before you, Most Holy God. You are the seed of possibility, the root of life, the growing harvest of justice, the off-shooting branch of salvation ... and we are impatient for it all. Impatient to know what might be.

Impatient to forecast our lives and to secure our futures. Impatient to see the fruit of justice. Impatient for your salvation and healing. We forget that this is your work, O God, not ours. Forgive us. Grant us the faith to wait and to watch for what you will do. Amen.

Song: Wanting Memories by Sweet Honey in the Rock

Joys & Concerns, Prayers of the People

Leader: In love and peace

All: We offer this prayer

Scripture - Jeremiah 33:14-16

33:14 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

33:15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

33:16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

The Mood of Christmas by Howard Thurman

Christmas is a mood, a quality, a symbol. It is never merely a fact. As a fact it is a date on the calendar — to the believer it is the anniversary of an event in human history. An individual may relate (themselves) meaningfully to the fact or the event, but that would not be Christmas.

The mood of Christmas — what is it? It is a quickening of the presence of other human beings into whose lives a precious part of one's own has been released. It is a memory of other days when into one's path an angel appeared spreading a halo over an ordinary moment or a commonplace event. It is an iridescence of sheer delight that bathes one's whole being with something more wonderful than words can ever tell. Of such is the mood of Christmas.

Reflections from Mary

Journaling/Reflection Time

Sharing Time

Hymn: O Come O Come Immanuel #172

Benediction: Mary Scott-Boria

Ending Song: Let There Be Peace on Earth

Reflection Questions

Consider what Howard Thurman says about the Mood of Christmas.

Waiting can be a gift. Something we often disregard as we think about the “real thing” of what’s to come. Waiting can be waiting, hoping, reflection and pausing.

Consider a time (anytime), when you were waiting for something. Recall the situation and what emotions / feelings / mood came up? What did you do?

Advent is a time of waiting; waiting for what’s to come. We are not talking about preparing anything here. Merely waiting.

How do you wait with a mind of hope? Name some practices /rituals/thoughts or actions that enhances your waiting.

Second Sunday of Advent: December 10, 2023
Preparing

Prelude

Song: Long Time Ago in Bethlehem

Welcome & Announcements

Offering

Vision Statement

*Growing into God's joyful, beloved community
and cultivating love, peace and justice in East
Garfield Park, Chicago and beyond.*

Candle Lighting

One: Prepare the way:

All: To the north, south, east and west.

One: Make room for God's work:

**All: In our hearts, in our world, in our
church, in our relationships.**

One: Be prepared: like a refiner's fire, God will
work to make us more beautiful than gold,
more precious than silver.

All: Prepare the way.

Prayer of Confession - Unison

Have mercy, O God: we want to prepare the
way for you, but we don't know which way you
are coming. Have mercy, O God: we want to
prepare the way for you, but we are so easily
distracted. Have mercy, O God: we want to
prepare the way for you, but if you come then

we will have to put aside our agendas and our egos. Have mercy, O God. Have mercy.

Song: Prepare the Way of the Lord

Joys & Concerns, Prayers of the People

Leader: In love and peace

All: We offer this prayer

Scripture – Malachi 3:1-4

3 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 washers' 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.

The Mood of Christmas by Howard Thurman

Christmas is a mood, a quality, a symbol. It is never merely a fact. As a fact it is a date on the calendar — to the believer it is the anniversary of an event in human history. An individual may

relate (themselves) meaningfully to the fact or the event, but that would not be Christmas.

The quality of Christmas — what is it? It is the fullness with which fruit ripens, blossoms unfold into flowers, and live coals glow in the darkness. It is the richness of vibrant colors — the calm purple of grapes, the exciting redness of tomatoes, the shimmering light on the noiseless stirring of a lake or sunset. It is the sense of plateau with a large rock behind which one may take temporary respite from winds that chill. Of such is the quality of Christmas.

Reflections from Heidi

Journaling/Reflection Time

Sharing Time

Hymn: The First Noel #199

Benediction: Heidi

Ending Song: Let There Be Peace on Earth

Reflection Questions

How might last week's theme, *waiting*, feel different than this week's theme, *preparing*? What are the tasks and projects on your list as you prepare for this holiday season with friends and family? What are the ways you feel invited or called to prepare spiritually, internally, during this Advent season?

The quote from Thurman includes many vivid images. What are images that come to mind for you to represent the act of preparing, or the quality of Christmas?

Third Sunday of Advent: December 17, 2023
Singing

Prelude: Do You Hear What I Hear?

Song: O Holy Night

Welcome & Announcements

Offering

Vision Statement

Growing into God's joyful, beloved community and cultivating love, peace and justice in East Garfield Park, Chicago and beyond.

Candle Lighting

One: Sing aloud, o people, sing and shout!

All: Rejoice with all your heart, o church!

One: Set your feet firmly on the ground, open your mouth,

All: And sing! Sing to bless the LORD who is in your midst.

One: Here is our song: a triumphant light against the long shadows.

All: With joy, we sing!

Prayer of Confession - Unison

Forgive us, O God. Too easily we give in to fear and we forget to sing your praise. Pour your joy over us and renew our hope. [silence] Forgive us, O God. Too easily we doubt our strength to do your work. Pour your song over us to wash away our shame and hesitation. [silence] Forgive us, O God. Too easily we

forget to see ourselves and one another in your image. Pour your love over us so that we recognize your beauty in our midst. [silence] Forgive us, O God, and restore us we pray. Amen.

Hymn: Hark the Herald Angels Sing #201

Joys & Concerns, Prayers of the People

Leader: In love and peace

All: We offer this prayer

Scripture – Zephaniah 3:14-20

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.

Scripture – Isaiah 12:2-6

Surely God is my salvation;

I will trust and will not be afraid,
for the Lord is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.”

³With joy you will draw water from the wells of
salvation. ⁴And you will say on that day:

“Give thanks to the Lord;
call on his name;

make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.

⁵Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done
gloriously;

let this be known in all the earth.

⁶Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of
Israel.”

The Mood of Christmas by Howard Thurman

Christmas is a mood, a quality, a symbol. It is never merely a fact. As a fact it is a date on the calendar — to the believer it is the anniversary of an event in human history. An individual may relate (themselves) meaningfully to the fact or the event, but that would not be Christmas.

The symbol of Christmas — what is it? It is the rainbow arched over the roof of the sky when the clouds are heavy with foreboding. It is the cry of life in the newborn babe when, forced from its mother's nest, it claims its right to live. It is the brooding Presence of the Eternal Spirit making crooked paths straight, rough places smooth, tired hearts refreshed, dead hopes stir with newness of life. It is the promise of tomorrow at the close of every day, the movement of life in defiance of death, and the assurance that love is sturdier than hate, that right is more confident than wrong, that good is more permanent than evil.

Reflections from Mattie

Journaling/Reflection Time

Sharing Time

Hymn: Angels We Have Heard on High #197

Benediction: Mattie

Ending Song: Let There Be Peace on Earth

Reflection Questions

What are some of the thoughts and emotions that come to mind when you read and listen to these scriptures?

Some of the thoughts and emotions that come to mind when you read and listen to the Howard Thurman Quotes:

Do they make you feel hopeful? Are your spirits lifted [in the light of your personal or circumstances in our world]? Does it make you feel like singing; and if so, what, if any song comes to mind?

What are things that make you sing or shout for Joy? Any recent [or distant] memories? Does it also give you encouragement and energy to move forward in whatever tasks you need to do?

Reflection for the week: Think about the power of Singing, and how Singing can lift your spirit and energy; even if you feel low to start.

Fourth Sunday of Advent: December 24, 2023
Laboring: Peace

Prelude:

Song: A Child is Born

Welcome & Announcements

Offering

Vision Statement

Growing into God's joyful, beloved community and cultivating love, peace and justice in East Garfield Park, Chicago and beyond.

Candle Lighting

One: From the smallest

All: To the greatest,

One: From the least

All: To the most,

One: In each one, there is a light to shine brightly.

All: We labor together for the light!

Prayer of Confession - Unison

It is so hard, O God — this work that you are doing, this work that you are asking us to do. It is so hard to wait and work, to love and labor, without seeing immediate results. It is so hard to care and imagine, to welcome and risk, without knowing what exactly you are doing or how exactly your kin(g)dom will come to pass. We are anxious. We are tired. We are restless. We are cynical. Have patience with us, we pray. Amen.

Song: What Child is This

Joys & Concerns, Prayers of the People

Leader: In love and peace

All: We offer this prayer

Song: Little Drummer Boy

Scripture – Micah 5:2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.

³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.

⁴ And he shall stand and feed his flock in the
strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his
God.

And they shall live secure, for now he shall be
great to the ends of the earth,

⁵ and he shall be the one of peace.

If the Assyrians come into our land
and tread upon our soil,
we will raise against them seven shepherds
and eight rulers.

The Mood of Christmas by Howard Thurman

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,*

*When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.*

Reflections from Mary

Journaling/Reflection Time

Sharing Time

Song: Mary Had a Baby Boy

Benediction: Mary

Ending Song: Let There Be Peace on Earth

Reflections