



December 19th, 2021

Fourth Sunday of Advent

A Room With a View (Love)

Twin Towers United Methodist Church

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**"The Inn" worship series by Worship Design Studio. Adapted, used, livestreamed with permission. "Hope Waits" and "Make of My Heart a Stable" by Amanda Udis-Kessler, used with permission.*

WORSHIP GUIDE

Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, 5 Advent candles (You can arrange them into an Advent wreath with greenery, place them on a plate, or just have them in a row. It's all good!), something to write on and with, your computer/connected device (if you intend to listen to music online), etc. Feel free to adapt this worship guide in any way that makes best sense to you and those you might be gathered with. (Consider inviting someone – a friend, a family member – to worship with you.) Commit to spending the next hour with God.

PRELUDE - Listen and sing along to a song or hymn that blesses and centers your spirit!

WELCOME – This has been an Advent season of prophets: Jeremiah, Baruch, Isaiah, Micah. And today, the prophet is Mary –the woman who was the original house for the holy. She was “the inn,” her womb gestating love for the world. With all her heart, she proclaims that the lowly are lifted, the hungry are fed, mercy reigns. Like Mary, we must envision, must see, must prophesy and act on that vision for the world that God continues to call us to co-create.

OPENING PRAYER - [<http://www.oldsouth.org/>]

Let us join our hearts in prayer....

O God, you broke down the barriers when you crept in beside us.

In Jesus, your hands touched all, and touched us.

You opened our eyes

to see how the hands of the rich were empty,

and the hearts of the poor were full.

You took the widow's mite and the child's loaves

and used them to show us the Kingdom.

Here in the company of the neighbor whom we know

and the stranger in our midst,

and the self from whom we turn,

we ask to love as Jesus loved.

Make this the place and time, good Lord,

when heaven and earth become one,

and we in word and flesh

know ourselves beloved. Amen.

CENTERING HYMN - “Hope Waits” vs. 4 (Sing once, light 4 candles, sing again)

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp80wPEc20E>

Love waits for us at Advent
Love waits for us to care.
Love waits for our compassion
freely offered, freely shared.
In this time of preparation
for the work of co-creation,
for the birthing of a world
where faith shapes all we do.
Love is born in us anew!

Today we offer the Light of Love to illumine the Door of Welcome.
May this light shine in our hearts, in our lives, and in our church.
May Love awaken us to possibilities and lead us to greater hospitality.
There *IS* room in this Inn, a House for the Holy.

SCRIPTURE - Micah 5:2-5a (CEB) & Luke 1: 46-55 (CEB)

As for you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
though you are the least significant of Judah’s forces,
one who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf will come out from you.
His origin is from remote times, from ancient days.
Therefore, he will give them up
until the time when she who is in labor gives birth.
The rest of his kin will return to the people of Israel.
He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
They will dwell secure,
because he will surely become great throughout the earth;
he will become one of peace.

Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. She entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. With a loud voice she blurted out, “God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb

jumped for joy. Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her.”

Mary said,

“With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.

He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.

Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored
because the mighty one has done great things for me.

Holy is his name.

He shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honors him as God.

He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
remembering his mercy,
just as he promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.”

This is the Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God!**

LISTEN - I have been thinking a lot about Terry this week.

Terry is one of our regular guests at Dine & Connect. He started coming a few months into the pandemic. The pandemic had caused his company to downsize and, for the first time in some 30 odd years, Terry was unemployed from his trucking work. Terry was always talkative and often stood to the side, talking to me or another volunteer long after he had picked up his meal. Which is how I found out about his hip, the great pain in his hip, and his need for a hip replacement. This is where things got a little complicated. While Terry received unemployment, his health benefits didn’t include hip replacement and the accompanying rehab needed. But without the hip replacement, Terry could no longer do the job that he had for most of his life. This is when we began to pray together, praying for God to make a way, praying for God to bring healing.

A couple of months ago, Terry came to Dine & Connect and excitedly told me about a job possibility working at O'Reilly's near the Park Street bridge. We prayed again. The next month, he shared that he got the job...but that it neither paid what he was first promised nor was he doing what he knew how to do. This last month, Terry came after we had closed up. Knowing he worked till 5:30 p.m., we had set aside two meals just for him. He was down and discouraged when he showed up. The work environment sounded wearing and difficult and, on top of all that, he had to last another 6 months to access their full health benefits. What was he to do? The pay was so low that he was burning through his savings, his hip was bothering him more and more. He couldn't apply to better paying jobs with the needed benefits due to his bum hip, but without the better paying job with needed benefits he couldn't fix his bum hip.

I have been thinking a lot about Terry this week and praying for him. (I fervently hope you'll join me in that prayer.) As I've done so, I find that I keep hearing Mary and her song, "My soul gives glory to my God..." and I am convinced that the song she sings, the song that rejoices in and celebrates a God who sees and blesses the lowly, whose extraordinary love fills the hungry with good things, gives aid, and recreates the world by turning it rightside up, is sung exactly for Terry. It is sung for all those like Terry who are struggling, feeling hopeless and helpless, who are living on the margins, who wonder if they'll ever be better days, and who are failed by the world's systems. I am convinced that Mary sings her song not because she has any real idea of who her child will be or what he will do, but because she trusts - defiantly - in a God whose vision for the world includes her, remembers her, uplifts her - ordinary, nondescript, poor, lowly.

This Christmas, I want so much for Mary's song to become Terry's song, for him to feel her hope and conviction, her assurance and trust. Truthfully, I want so much for each of us - me included - to join in Mary's song. For it is a song not only of great rejoicing, but of powerful proclamation and conviction, of who God is and what God is doing in the world. It is a song of hope, yes, but it is also a battle song of sorts, one that calls us into action.

How might we join Mary in the singing of her song this Christmas, Friends, and make room in the coming year, in our lives and in this church, for the loving work of transforming the world into one that works for all? Let's pray.

We often give so much attention to Mary when she is visited by the angel Gabriel who announces to her the stunning news of her pregnancy, and Mary's gentle, almost docile response, "Here am I...let it be with me according to your word", that we fail to take note of the provocative and prophetic song that Mary sings in the aftermath.

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

There is no “meek and mild” here, only bold and prophetic. Not only is this the longest set of words spoken by a woman in the New Testament, they are spoken by a woman who held no status nor wealth, was not educated, and whose very condition - being pregnant out of wedlock - put her at risk of losing everything! We might hear a defiance then in Mary’s song as she sings of being claimed, chosen by God for God’s most important work: that of smuggling God into the world, and as she sings of God’s solidarity with all those like her: the lowly, the hungry, the powerless, the struggling. Mary sings of a God who “scatters the proud” and “brings down the powerful”. She sings of God’s movement as sending “the rich away empty.” God does this to ensure there is room in the world, not just for those who can pay for it, not just for those who can command or demand room for themselves, but so that the vulnerable, the marginalized, the stigmatized, the cast aside might be included, might be filled, might be lifted up. Mary sings of a world turned upside down or rightside up.

It’s no wonder then that Mary’s song was banned, first by the British in India, and later by the Guatemalan then the Argentinian governments. It could not be sung in church services, recited by the masses, nor printed on public posters. Why? Because the people in each of these places, each during incredibly oppressive and dangerous times - times in which people seeking freedom and liberation were being disappeared, beaten, and tortured by the rich and powerful - were singing Mary’s song. They were inspired by it, encouraged and affirmed by it, called into action through it.

What about us? Do the “wondrous reversals” of which Mary sings move our hearts? Will we join in the singing? Will we declare our solidarity with all those like Mary, all those like Terry, all those like Jesus? Will we glory in God’s movement to right our world, even if it costs us something? And will Mary’s song spur us to do the hard work of stepping down from our thrones of privilege, of making room for the presence, the voices, the reality of the lowly, and of sharing what we have - maybe sacrificially - so that the hungry can be filled with good things? My prayer is that this Christmas we will welcome Jesus, make room for him, by singing with Mary.

“My soul gives glory to my God.

My heart pours out its praise.

God lifted up my lowliness in many marvelous ways.

Love casts the mighty from their thrones,

promotes the insecure,

leaves hungry spirits satisfied,

the rich seem suddenly poor.”

Listen here: <https://youtu.be/sWZ92Rqo4M4>

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE – *Spend time in prayer. What did you hear for yourself through today’s scripture and reflection? Talk to God about it. Then lift up the joys and concerns that are in your heart. You might write them down, speak them aloud, or pray for them in silence.*

We would be honored to pray with you and for you.

Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give a call to our Healing Prayer Team.

SHARING OUR GIFTS– *How might you offer yourself and all that you have to God this week? How are you being invited to practice generosity? Spend a moment listening for God’s direction.*

You are invited to contribute financially towards the purpose and ministry of TTUMC. We are a congregation committed to being conduits of God’s healing in our neighborhood and beyond, and in so doing, impact the last and the least. You can contribute by mailing in a check, dropping off cash, or giving online (visit www.twintowersumc.org). Take a moment and do that now.

CLOSING HYMN - “O Come, All Ye Faithful”, UMH 234

Listen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VSuKgnGz_Q

Today's closing carol is "O Come, All Ye Faithful," an 18th century hymn by John Francis Wade. This carol invites us to come "joyful and triumphant." It moves between exhortation and doctrine from the Nicene Creed in the second verse. But each verse moves from boisterous to almost a hushed tone at the beginning of the refrain as we tiptoe into the stable with "O come, let us adore him." A little-known verse included at the end focuses on love and places us in the manger with Jesus.

O Come all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem.
Come and behold him,
born the King of angels;

Refrain:

O come let us adore him, (x3)
Christ the Lord.

2. True God of true God,
Light from Light Eternal,

lo, he shuns not the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father, begotten not created;

3. *Child, for us sinners
poor and in the manger,
Fain we embrace thee,
with awe and love:
Who would not love thee,
loving us so dearly?
O come, let us adore him...*

Each one of us has known the need to love and be loved, to forgive and be forgiven, to embrace and be embraced. May we approach each person we meet with the adoration of Jesus Christ, tender and merciful, loving and kind, and make this a house of adoration for all.

BENEDICTION -

May God's Door of Welcome swing open in your heart and in your life.

May Christ's humble first dwelling remind you of the plenty you already know.

And may the Spirit lead you into more possibility and hospitality than you can imagine, making room in The Inn for all.

May it be so for you.

May it be so for us.

May it be so for this church. Amen.

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

NEXT WEEK'S SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3:12-17 & Matthew 2:1-12

Please make note of these warm invites and gentle reminders:

- **Christmas Eve RSVP's** - We are so excited to hold a special hybrid (in-person and online) Christmas Eve candlelight worship this year! As we do so, we request that all who will attend in-person to please RSVP [here](#). Please do so no later than Wednesday, Dec. 22nd.
- **Sharing @ Christmas** - Join the Care, Share, and Serve Team in gifting our RV family, Sarina, Ben, and Vanity, with Christmas treats. You can find their simple wish list [here](#). Please bring wrapped and labeled gifts to the church by Wednesday, Dec. 22nd. We plan to share these gifts with the family after our Christmas Eve worship service.
- **Calling Welcomers!** Are you ready to gather in person and welcome others to the same? We are forming a new welcoming team for our January launch date and invite you to pitch in! Please send me a note if you're ready and willing.

Peace, *Emily*