



First Presbyterian Church of New Philadelphia

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Rev. Joseph Svancara, Pastor

**Sunday Worship Service
December 21, 2025**

*All who are able, please stand.

Announcements & Prayer Concerns

Finance will be meeting Tuesday (December 23) at 7pm.

Bible Study and AA will not be meeting this Wednesday due to Christmas Eve.

The church office will be closed Wednesday and Thursday for Christmas.

Our annual Christmas Eve service will be this Wednesday (December 24) at 7pm.

Come for an evening of carols, candlelight, and celebration of divine love!

Our Sunday Morning Study Group will be meeting next Sunday (December 28) at 9:15am. We are currently reading through "The Practice of the Presence of God" by Brother Lawrence. See Rev. Joe if you want to join!

During the month of December, we are taking up special offerings for the PCUSA's Christmas Joy Offering and our local Share-a-Christmas event. Donation envelopes are available on the back mission table.

Opening Prayer

LORD, our Creator, you have promised a Son to us, a king to rule over us, and protect us from all that is false and destructive in this world. Nothing can take the place of your Jesus in our lives, so help us cling to and realize all that he brings. **Amen.**

Prelude *From Heaven Above to Earth I Come* arr. R Wilson

***Call to Worship (Psalm 80)**

Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim. In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up your strength and come to help us.

Restore us, O God; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

O LORD God of hosts, how long will your anger fume when your people pray? You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have given them bowls of tears to drink. You have made us the derision of our neighbors, and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

You have brought a vine out of Egypt; you cast out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered by its shadow and the towering cedar trees by its boughs. You stretched out its tendrils to the sea and its branches to the river.

Why have you broken down its wall, so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes? The wild boar of the forest has ravaged it, and the beasts of the field have grazed upon it.

Turn now, O God of hosts, look down from heaven; behold and tend this vine; preserve what your right hand has planted. They burn it with fire like rubbish; at the rebuke of your countenance let them perish. Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one you have made so strong for yourself. And so will we never turn away from you; give us life, that we may call upon your name.

Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

Hymn #9 *O Come, O Come, 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.

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife, and discord cease;
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

***Prayer of Confession**

We trust in what we can see, hear, and measure in this life. But what the LORD provides cannot be quantified in that manner, and leads us to admission:

LORD, our Creator, we have trusted in the things of this life that promise so much and ask so much of us. Your promised Son is one who give selflessly and asks for nothing. But we push aside that promise and example because we cannot understand that kind of life. Help us to realize what the coming of Jesus means, what it changes, and allows us to become when we set aside all false examples. Amen.

***Silent Confessions and Prayers**

***Assurance of Forgiveness**

Even when we cannot understand the LORD appears and reveals truth. Humility before, and respect of, the LORD is the start of this true wisdom.

May we be open for what the LORD reveals and provides, and may this promised Son become the example we can strive for and accept.

Hymn #579 *Gloria Patri

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

Reading of the Scriptures

All Scripture lessons come from the Revised Common Lectionary. Prescribed lessons are underlined, with pastoral inserts to preserve the integrity of the passage.

Hear the Word of the Lord:

Isaiah 7:1-25

7 ¹ In the days of Ahaz son of Jotham son of Uzziah, king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel went up to attack Jerusalem, but could not mount an attack against it. ² When the house of David heard that Aram had allied itself with Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind. ³ Then the Lord said to Isaiah, Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field, ⁴ and say to him, Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. ⁵ Because Aram—with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah—has plotted evil against you, saying, ⁶ Let us go up against Judah and cut off Jerusalem and conquer it for ourselves and make the son of Tabeel king in it; ⁷ therefore thus says the Lord God: It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. ⁸ For the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. (Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered, no longer a people.) ⁹ The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all. ¹⁰ Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹² But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. ¹³ Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also?" ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. ¹⁷ The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on your ancestral house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria." ¹⁸ On that day the Lord will whistle for the fly that is at the sources of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. ¹⁹ And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures. ²⁰ On that day the Lord will shave with a razor hired beyond the River—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will take off the beard as well. ²¹ On that day one will keep alive a young cow and two sheep, ²² and will eat curds because of the abundance of milk that they give; for everyone that is left in the land shall eat curds and honey. ²³ On that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become briars and thorns. ²⁴ With bow and arrows one will go there, for all the land will be briars and thorns; ²⁵ and as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not go there for fear of briars and thorns; but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread.

Romans 1:1-7

1 ¹ Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³ the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶ including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. ⁷ To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 1:18-25

1 ¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

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

Sermon *The Fourth Sunday of Advent*

When speaking about the arrival of Jesus Christ, when attempting to understand who is the Son of God, we can trip over ourselves in trying to read too much into the recorded texts of divine promise. Even the term 'Son of God' is loaded with connotations and assumptions about how we already view and feel about the LORD, and each other by consequence. One of the biggest criticisms others have about the Christian faith is how we can believe the LORD has a son? An infinite deity needing to procreate using an innocent human virgin sounds too outlandish to some, and there is even the danger of setting a trend to be repeated by those less scrupulous individuals.

The belief in the virgin birth originates when we recount the story in the gospels, especially in Matthew when the man Joseph is visited by a divine messenger. The purpose is to express that the message of Jesus Christ, the message of the renewed covenant with the LORD, did not originate from human means. It came directly from the LORD without the influence of original sin, the human mentalities we struggle with on a daily basis. It was love and possibility which influenced the message, not human selfishness and assumptions.

But even what is recorded in Matthew came from earlier sources, even to those in that first century. Isaiah wrote during a time in Israel's history where uncertainty abounded, where even those who sat on the throne questioned who they were and supposed to do as divine representatives. In that culture and time of the Ancient Near East the idea of kingship was grounded in power, might, and confidence. The so-called 'God-Kings' of ancient Sumera, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and many others took that title with the understanding that they were the closest to the divine, had the closest understanding of the divine will, and were endowed with the ability and necessity to carry it out. Those kings saw themselves as gods in their own right, and charged with keeping order no matter what to keep the world going. To the Israelite mindset centuries, or millennia, after that acceptance there was the struggle of leadership under the watchful influence of an all-present being who actively intervened into the physical world. That is where the understanding of the 'Son of God' came, a title used by Israelite culture to describe the king and leadership of their people. One who was not the LORD themselves or endowed with special powers or charges in their own right. But one who was a representative. One who used their own knowledge, experience, and wisdom given by the divine for the purpose of keeping order. The LORD was a father who passed all that was necessary to the son so the lineage could continue. And the king was a son in the manner that the way he acted reflected on the legitimacy of the father. The 'Son of God', the king, the intermediary who carried the wisdom of the ages to the people who needed to understand it the most.

The 'Son of God' at that moment was Ahaz, caught in a tangled and complicated political environment. Modern scholars call it the Syro-Ephraimite War, which pitted the Kingdom of Judah (Ahaz) against a coalition of kingdoms, including Damascus (Syria) and the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim). The opposing coalition sought to attack and depose Ahaz, then put a new king in charge that would join them in opposition of the expanding Assyrian Empire. Ahaz heard from the LORD through the prophet about who he was to be, what was promised, amid this great upheaval. And the promise was the birth of a son, a sign of political continuity for Judah, that the Davidic dynasty would continue and not usurped by human means. The fact that the young woman (virgin, because youth and chastity were often fused together in that culture) would give birth is a sign that the LORD's influence would never wane because of human developments, and would ensure his wisdom would find a way to come through and reach the people trapped in darkness.

Symbolically, this young woman could also be seen as the personification of divine wisdom. One who births and nurtures the kings of Israel, imbuing them with the ability to know, live, and exemplify the covenant for all to understand. And that one to then sit on the throne will be called Immanuel, a proof that the LORD is present and on the people's side. And for Mary and Joseph, all of those in their time under the uncertainty of the Roman Empire and uncertainty of the Jerusalem Temple, the words of the coming child will prove the LORD is there and giving life to whoever needs it.

And that is how St. Paul opens his letter to the church in Rome, describing who Jesus Christ is in that context and time of leadership uncertainty. One who was described in hope by the prophets, from the continuing family of David representing eternal promise, and whose grace and witness bring about faith in all people. Not just select people, those deserving because of ethnicity or belief alone, but to bring a renewing spirit of holiness to all. Jesus is the 'Son of God' in that he represents what the LORD desires of his children, and what we can become by willingness and obedience to what is taught. Jesus trusted the LORD with his life and was redeemed even from death, so not even time could erase or change what he stood for.

And for us, in this time and season, in ANY time and season, the birth of Christ is the reminder of hope within the darkness. This is not the LORD chucking away and starting over with a new plan, but going to painstaking means and ends to keep his people as they should be. To set them up to successfully speak and live the wisdom that was taught to them, and which will heal the rest of the world by extension. We celebrate the hope that the divine presence has not left us, and has not been changed, but continues and is available to all who need it. That is the power seen and celebrated in the birth to come.

Prayers of the People

Let us remember in prayer:

Dominic Aquino, Tom & Amy Aquino, Mary Ellen Beans, Terry Carpenter, Fritz Chambers, Michelle Chamberlain, Mary Jane Dougherty, Don Eberheart Jr., Allison Folly, Kay France, Jamie Frank, Pam Hykes, Judy Hass, Alice & Errol Jacobs, Victoria Kasten, Amber Loftis, David Mackey, Breanne Mathias, Will Long, Tom Netting, Ruth Patrick, Bob Pierre, Mark Preusser, Stefani Seth, Josh Shaeffer, Marlene Singhaus, Dane & Cindy Smith, Derrick & Mandy Smith, Dean & Heidi Unzicker, Simone Villarruel, Holly Waldenmyer, The Friends of the Homeless of Tuscarawas County & The Homeless of Tuscarawas County.

LORD, our Creator, the needs of the world, the needs of our lives, are recorded in history. It is a story that speaks of deprivation, desperation, control, fear, might, power, and assurance. It is about humans striving to live in circumstances beyond imagination and attempting to figure if it is worth living. But you are the life of the world, the light to all humanity, the one who constantly reassures and teaches what it means to live in joy abundant. That it does not depend on having the right amount of money, the biggest weapons, the most feared power, or the right lineage- but the willingness to see and accept that wisdom and knowledge which makes us more aware, more illuminated, to see things as you do. We are all your children, cold and in the dark, and your Son is the one who brings confidence that we can live and be who you want us to be. In certainty.

For the needs of our lives, our loved ones, we call upon that certainty. We call upon the soon-arriving Son to show us what is possible amid the impossible...*Reading of the Prayer List*...LORD, in your mercy and love, hear our prayers.

Moment of Silence

Your ears are always attuned to when we speak and cry out to you, and for when we hold back and have no words. Your presence is a comfort and reminder that the whole of our beings are yours, and you work for our good always. So we might pray, proclaim, and celebrate the words you have given us:

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.

Offering our Gifts

In the giving of the Son the LORD has shown mercy and generosity to be emulated. May all we give be in the same purpose of provision to those who have none.

Offertory *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* arr. T Kirkland

Hymn #592 *Doxology

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**

LORD, our Creator, in preparing for the arrival of your Son we accept the generosity you bestow on all your created. In all that we give may it build up your human family as well, teach them what is wise, and endow them with joyful and abundant life. All so we can proclaim that your love is here and present forever. **Amen.**

Hymn #20 *Watchman, Tell Us of the Night

Watchman, tell us of the night,
What its signs of promise are.
Traveler, o'er yon mountain's height,
See that glory-beaming star.
Watchman, does its beauteous ray
Aught of joy or hope foretell?

Traveler, yes; it brings the day,
Promised day of Israel.

Watchman, tell us of the night;
Higher yet that star ascends.
Traveler, blessedness and light,
Peace and truth its course portends.
Watchman, will its beams alone
Gild the spot that gave them birth?
Traveler, ages are its own;
See, it bursts o'er all the earth.

Watchman, tell us of the night,
For the morning seems to dawn.
Traveler, darkness takes its flight,
Doubt and terror are withdrawn.
Watchman, let thy wanderings cease;
Hasten to your quiet home.
Traveler, lo! the Prince of Peace,
Lo! the Son of God is come!

***Benediction**

Hear now, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; you will love your neighbor as yourself.

With the gospel of Jesus Christ guiding you, go into the world to live this sole purpose.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

***Postlude Good Christian Men Rejoice arr. G Martin**

Be blessed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ wherever you may go!

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