



First Presbyterian Church of New Philadelphia

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Rev. Joseph Svancara, Pastor

Sunday Worship Service

December 28, 2025

*All who are able, please stand.

Announcements & Prayer Concerns

Bible Study will be this Wednesday (December 31) at 10am.

AA will meet this Wednesday (December 31) at 8pm.

The church office will be closed Thursday for New Year's Day.

Our Sunday Morning Study Group will be meeting next Sunday (January 4) 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!

Next Sunday (January 4) is our "First Celebration Sunday" with Holy Communion in worship followed by a church brunch. All are welcome!

Thank you to everyone who helped to contribute in December to the PCUSA's Christmas Joy Offering and the Share-a-Christmas collection!

Opening Prayer

LORD, our Creator, in the birth of your Son you have revealed truths within the world which can be challenging and uncomfortable for some. But which you have revealed to guide and strengthen your people with purpose. May the arrival of Jesus be a mirror which we can see others, ourselves, and heavily consider who you are in our lives.

Amen.

Prelude *What Child Is This?* arr. J Carrier

***Call to Worship (Psalm 148)**

Hallelujah! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise God in the heights.

Praise the LORD, all you angels; sing praise, all you hosts of heaven.

Praise the LORD, sun and moon; sing praise, all you shining stars.

Praise the LORD, heaven of heavens, and you waters above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of the LORD, who commanded, and they were created, who made them stand fast forever and ever, giving them a law which shall not pass away.

Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps; fire and hail, snow and fog, tempestuous wind, doing God's will; mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars; wild beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds; sovereigns of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the world; young men and maidens, old and young together.

Let them praise the name of the LORD, whose name only is exalted, whose splendor is over earth and heaven.

The LORD has raised up strength for the people and praise for all faithful servants, the children of Israel, a people who are near the LORD. Hallelujah!

Hymn #22 *Angels, From The Realms Of Glory

Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth.
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!

Shepherds, in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing;
Yonder shines the infant light:
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!

Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations;
Ye have seen His natal star.
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!

All creation, join in praising
God, the Father, Spirit, Son,
Evermore your voices raising
To the eternal Three in One.

Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!

***Prayer of Confession**

We trust in the proclamation of the angels, and people, for what is important and right. But often we get lost in the interpretation, the opinion, and lose sight of what is for our benefit:

LORD, our Creator, you have designed the earth and all that is in it to shout for joy and praise of your holy name. But others often use that name to claim what they want, change us to suit their needs, and we insecurely buy into all of that. Through your Jesus, help us to see and experience the truth he reveals about all in this world. So we might be freed from others' expectations and embrace what you have for us. Amen.

***Silent Confessions and Prayers**

***Assurance of Forgiveness**

Even Israel became lost while in the wilderness with no sense of direction, but the LORD rained food from heaven, water from dry rocks, and a fiery cloud to guide out of his love for them.

In Jesus Christ, in the promise of baptism, that same love is revealed and relived so we might know what is real again.

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 63:1-19

63 ¹ “Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson? Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in his great might?” “It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save.” ² “Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?” ³ “I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their juice spattered on my garments, and stained all my robes. ⁴ For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year for my redeeming work had come. ⁵ I looked, but there was no helper; I stared, but there was no one to sustain me; so my own arm brought me victory, and my wrath sustained me. ⁶ I trampled down peoples in my anger, I crushed them in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.” ⁷ I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, because of all that the Lord has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. ⁸ For he said, “Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely”; and he became their savior ⁹ in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. ¹⁰ But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit; therefore he became their enemy; he himself fought against them. ¹¹ Then they remembered the days of old, of Moses his servant. Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit, ¹² who caused his glorious arm to march at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, ¹³ who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. ¹⁴ Like cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of the Lord gave them rest. Thus you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name. ¹⁵ Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The yearning of your heart and your compassion? They are withheld from me. ¹⁶ For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name. ¹⁷ Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage. ¹⁸ Your holy people took possession for a little while; but now our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary. ¹⁹ We have long been like those whom you do not rule, like those not called by your name.

Hebrews 2:5-18

² ⁵ Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶ But someone has testified somewhere, “What are human beings that you are mindful

of them, or mortals, that you care for them? ⁷ You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, ⁸ subjecting all things under their feet.” Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, ⁹ but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰ It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹² saying, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” ¹³ And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Here am I and the children whom God has given me.” ¹⁴ Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. ¹⁶ For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Matthew 2:13-23

2 ¹³ Now after they [the Magi] had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.” ¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

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

Sermon *The First Sunday of Christmas*

In celebrating the season of Christmas, in relishing in the divine promises revealed in Jesus Christ, what we do not expect are stories and echoes of judgment. We want to think that the story of the nativity is over with Jesus snug in the manger and safe, the wise men’s presents scattered around, and the angels casting holy light to identify this sacred child for all time. But part of the idea of the Incarnation is that Jesus has not just

revealed the good of the human condition but also the destructive. That is also the conundrum we are caught in as well in living daily, we strive to live good and noble lives based on gospel principles but are faced with the destruction of others' making.

This current Sunday also has another commemoration, "The Massacre of the Innocents". From the account in Matthew, when the Magi entered Judea and announced they were seeking the LORD's Messiah the ruling king at the time, Herod, was "troubled" along with all of the elites in Jerusalem and in the Temple. That 'trouble' felt was not just because Herod was autocratic in his rule, even going so far as to kill one of his own sons who seemed like a threat to his rule. A contested throne meant disorder and a threat of upheaval, something the Romans did not like. The Romans often supported rulers and dynasties they thought could keep order on their behalf. Because if they didn't, that meant compete conquest and assimilation of the conquered culture- something the Jews strived not to have happen to them. So Herod did what he did best, kill off any rumors of a rival king to keep the status quo.

Looking back on the story, we might be tempted to believe that everything in the nativity story happened in the single night. But the timeline of events show that Jesus and his family lived in Bethlehem several years before they were forced to flee, possibly with others, who feared the response of their government to them. Jesus' arrival uncorked all the insecurities of leadership at the time, showed that the 'peace' of Rome was not a true peace but a hostage situation, and a yearning of the people to truly live out from under threat of those who claimed to represent their interests. The innocents who died represent a mirror held up to worldly leaders then, and now, that even the best attempts to rule fall short. Something more than human will and drive is necessary to have a healthy society and people.

The prophet Isaiah then speaks to emphasize that need within a historical moment of destruction and soul-searching for the LORD's people. This part of Isaiah was written after the destruction of the kingdom of Judah and the razing of the Jerusalem Temple by the Babylonians. Not only did the Babylonians, a mighty empire, attack but also all of Israel's traditional and ancestral enemies. Edom represented one of the oldest rivalries who attempted to enrich themselves at the destruction of another. The LORD shows that he would not put up with that kind of behavior, and promised equal judgment to all who engaged in those wars when they went too far.

But the passage also represents a struggle with how the people viewed the LORD, and their religious understanding at the time. In exile there was a growing interest in angels and intermediary spirits, that the LORD used these kinds of messengers to deliver what his people needed. If the LORD was truly spirit and formless, not able to be represented physically or in idol form, then these intermediaries explained how such events like the burning bush or the cloud of fire in Exodus happened. But that interpretation also represented that the wisdom and teachings bestowed were not from the LORD, just his messengers. The whole idea of the covenant was that the LORD

was the one making an agreement with the people; invested enough to be in this world and carry out events to help his people grow and become wise. It also explained why some fell away and did not accept the covenant at the time, having given into the temptation of the religious worldviews around them to explain what they did not understand. Again, the LORD's intervention was a mirror by which the people could see and understand the difference between what they accepted and what was promised and carried out. Something more than human armies, centuries-old grudges and vendettas, or creative interpretations crafted and kept a people on the surest path.

And that understanding reaches a climax with Hebrews brought in, a writing to help those in the church who struggled with assurance within their faith amid mounting criticism and pressure to conform to what the authorities instructed. Sure, the high priest and other learned scholars had authority and knowledge to debate and pressure new believers to give up their faith. So their source of faith, their understanding of 'Messiah' and 'Son of God' had to be beyond what was interpreted because it was a mirror which challenged the already-established institutions if they represented the divine will. Jesus came not to be like other leaders, not to be like other priests, or continue teachings and ways to keep a status quo. He came and worked for the good of the children of Abraham, the people of promise who looked beyond this world for what they needed. Who learned from experience that human leadership and ways did not achieve what was needed, and can change to become destructive based on a short-sighted will of one person. Jesus came to remind all there was a will reasserting itself, reminding the world the way things should be, so that all people can understand and access the holy instruction necessary for a wise and beneficial life.

The life of Jesus is not all greeting card fairy tales and Christmas movie hijinks, but a divine and holy reminder about the state of things and what needed to change. It can be painful, disturbing, and uncomfortable to remember the innocents who died because of one king's insecurity. But they must be, and deserve to be, remembered as those who testified through their lives lived and died the one who truly rules and cannot be encumbered by anything worldly. Their innocence lost is our innocence and confidence in the powers within society today, and how our needs can be quickly turned aside by one decision. But the LORD is one who has actually come to us, placed his Holy Spirit within us, and gives the direction that will actually make the difference in whatever we are going through. Christmas celebrates but also reminds us who is, and who is not, close for when life gets messy and help is needed.

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, 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, Gene & Ruth Joyce Zimmerly, The Friends of the Homeless of Tuscarawas County & The Homeless of Tuscarawas County.

LORD, our Creator, the Christmas story is one which fills us all with hope and expectation of what you provide. But by extension it reveals all within the world, within our lives, which does not fit or operate according to your will. It is distressing, inconvenient, and hard to see these differences around us and makes us wonder if we have been living a lie? The arrival of your divine light brings assurance and certainty, but also truth about why everyone does what they do. You do not mean to scare us or make us give up hope that things can be better, but you teach us how we can be the agents of change who bring about your will and desire. There is no place that can escape this divine touch, and is all thanks to you meeting us first and no one else.

So we bring the issues and challenges we face and realize, all that is wrong and needs correction, in the hope your spirit will reveal what we can do next...*Reading of the Prayer List*...LORD, in your loving mercy, hear our prayers.

Moment of Silence

Blessed are you, the architect of truth, who cuts through all that is misleading so we might be liberated to know and live as you have us to. Only by you is this possible, only by the coming of your Son could this happen, and we are grateful. Help us to seek the truth, live what is holy, and bring to life the words you have taught 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 all things the LORD provides good to his people, and to others through them. Let us continue that same benefit in what we purposefully offer.

Offertory *In The Bleak Midwinter* arr. C Boyles

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, you are closer to us than we expect and reveal the truth of all things for our lives. The gifts you offer continue through us, and we thank you for the chance to give and demonstrate all that you love and value. **Amen.**

Hymn #40 *Joy To The World!

Joy to the world! the Lord is come:
let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns:
let us our songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

***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 *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* arr. R Hughs**

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

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