November 29, 2026 + 10:30 A.M.
First Sunday of Advent

We Join in Worship

If you need extra space for a wheelchair or walker, or if you have young children with you, please feel free to make use of our Prayground, the extra space across the aisle from the sound booth.

Liturgist: Vimary Couvertier Cruz

PRELUDE O Come, O Come, Emmanuel — Thirteenth-century Plainsong. Arr. Cindy Berry

WELCOME

CHORAL INTROIT

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

***LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH** Nancy and Jerry Veltman

One: As we journey through Advent, this season of waiting and watching with expectant hope, we use light to illuminate our path. This light shines on all that is good. This light drives away the forces of this world that seek to take away our hope, peace, joy, and love. And so we light a different candle each week, reminding us that Christ is the light that gives us life.

(the first purple candle is lit)

ALL: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light!

One: As we look to that light, may we let it guide us on our way along the path of Advent. This week our flame is for **HOPE**, a sign to us that in a world of violence, hatred, and brokenness, God shines light on a different way for us. God shows us that something good and beautiful is about to come, and we are part of it!

ALL: Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

***CALL TO WORSHIP** *(Adapted from Psalm 80)*

Leader: Give ear, O Shepherd, you who lead us like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth!

ALL: Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Leader: Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see.

ALL: Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Leader: Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself.

ALL: Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Leader: We will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

ALL: Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. Let us worship God!

***OPENING HYMN:** "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" (2)

INVITATION TO CONFESSION:

Leader: In *1 Corinthians* Paul writes that we should not lack in any gift as we wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Together let us confess how we have been lacking in hope as we wait.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (unison)

God of hope, we confess that while we wait for the coming of your son, we let despair consume us. We fail to look up with hope for Christ who is to come again. We fail to look around us with hope for the ways that you will transform the world. We fail to look within ourselves with hope for the potential that we have through the Holy Spirit. Reorient us to the hope that you give us. Help us to live and breathe hope for all that you have in store. In the name of the source of all hope, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

KYRIE

Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Leader: Friends, hear the good news! God will strengthen us to the end, so that we may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ALL: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven and have our hope! Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!

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.

STATEMENT OF FAITH (adapted from *The Confession of 1967*)

God's reign is present as a ferment in the world, stirring hope in people and preparing the world to receive its ultimate judgment and redemption. With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.

We Hear God's Word

EMBODIED WORD FOR DISCIPLES OF ALL AGES

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of all creation, send your Holy Spirit among us this day, that the seed of your Word might take root in our hearts and bear the fruits of hope, peace, joy, and love. Amen.

HEBREW BIBLE LESSON: *Jeremiah* 33:14-16

EPISTLE LESSON: *1 Corinthians* 1:3-9

GOSPEL LESSON: *Mark* 13:24-33

SERMON: Living, Breathing Hope

MUSICAL MEDITATION: *Breath of Heaven* Amy Grant

We Respond in Faith

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.

CHORAL RESPONSE

OFFERING INVITATION:

Leader: Christ is the source of all hope. As we commence Advent in times like these, we know the deep significance of hope. Let us give our tithes and offerings with hopeful and generous hearts. Please place your offering in the plate as it is passed. If you are worshiping from home, please mail in your checks or use our online giving option on the website. Let us reflect on stewardship as we listen to today's offertory.

OFFERTORY The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came — Traditional Basque Carol

***DOXOLOGY**

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

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION:** (Unison)

O God, we dedicate these gifts to you and to your Kingdom with hopeful and generous hearts. Please continue to fill us with hope as we navigate these times together! We pray in the name of the source of all hope, Jesus Christ. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN** "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates" (8)

We Go Into the World

BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE Lo, He Comes With Clouds Descending — Traditional English Melody

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Life of the Church

PEEK AT THE WEEK:

SUNDAY 11/29:	FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
	Adult Study – 9:00 AM
	Worship In Person & Online – 10:30 AM
MONDAY 11/30:	GA – 6:30 PM
	Al-Anon – 7:00 PM
TUESDAY 12/1:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH)
	Deacons – 6:30 PM
	AA – 7:30 PM
WEDNESDAY 12/2:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH)
	"Bring Your Own Bible" Bible Study 7-8 PM (Zoom)
	GA – 7:00 PM
THURSDAY 12/3:	Choir – 7:00 PM
SATURDAY 12/5:	AA – 6:30 PM
SUNDAY 12/6:	COMMUNION
	Lunch, Holiday Crafts & Caroling Event Following Worship

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **ADVENT DEVOTIONAL** This year's advent devotional is from the *Presbyterian Outlook,* titled "Dear Pastor: Advent Letters." This booklet contains Scripture passages, letters inspired by real experiences and questions, pastoral responses, and reflections on the advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love. The weekly devotions from the booklet will be emailed out to everyone on our church email list with the bulletin every week, beginning with the worship bulletin for Nov. 29. For those who receive the weekly bulletin in the mail, the advent devotional will be mailed to you as well. There will be a few paper copies of the booklet in the Narthex for those who prefer a paper copy over an electronic one. If you have any questions, contact Heather Casiano.
- **ADVENT CRAFTS & CAROLING, DECEMBER 6TH!** Make plans after worship to join in the festivities! There will be a light lunch served, followed by two craft stations, a card-making station, cookie decorating, and Christmas Caroling to a few of our church members. Stay for the whole time, or come at 2:30 for the caroling. Everyone is welcome, so bring your friends and family! **We need about 4 dozen cookies donated for those we visit as we go caroling. If you would like to donate one dozen cookies, homemade or store bought, please contact Heather Casiano. Please no nuts, peanut butter or sugar cookies. Faith Development will be providing sugar cookies for decorating.
- **CHRISTMAS CANTATA SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13TH!** Invite your loved ones and be sure to join us for this joyful celebration of worship led by our choir!
- **"BYOB"** (Bring Your Own Bible) discussion group meets on Wednesday evenings from 7-8 pm online using Zoom. Each week this group takes a look at the scriptures from our Sunday worship services, asking questions, bringing up different perspectives, and hopefully encountering the Holy Spirit in a fresh way. The link for the Zoom meetings is emailed out weekly. If you're not familiar with how to use Zoom, or to get on our e-mail list, please contact Pastor Tyler or Heather Casiano. All belong! You can join even if you have never done so before!
- **"THE BIBLE IN TODAY'S WORLD"** study class meets on Sunday mornings from 9-10 am at the church. We are excited to be using the study guide *United through Christ, Bound to Each Other: Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*. If you have any questions, contact Heather Casiano. All are welcome! You can join even if you have never done so before!
- **FELLOWSHIP HOSTING** We are asking folks to sign up to host fellowship time. Hosting entails bringing a simple snack to share, setting it out, and cleaning up afterwards. On Sundays with no sign-ups, we will still have coffee and tea to enjoy.

- **FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!** If you don't already follow us on Facebook and Instagram, please start doing so @firstpchighland on both Facebook and Instagram.
- **INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER OF FPCH?** You are always welcome here, whether a member or not! If you are interested in joining as a member, though, we would love to have you! Please talk to Pastor Tyler if you would like to learn more.

Opportunities to serve as the HEART, HANDS, and FEET of Jesus Christ:

- **BLESSING BOX** Please continue to place items in the Blessing Box and take items if you are a person in need! Items most commonly donated: Canned goods with pull tabs, socks, toilet paper, non-perishable foods, small snacks, toiletries, baby wipes and diapers. Please check expiration dates!
- **HELP STOCK OUR PANTRY!** Please bring non-perishable foods to help the church's food pantry.
- **GOT SNEAKERS?** The sneakers that we all collect will help raise money to support our church's general fund AND will help our environment by keeping sneakers out of landfills. Bring the sneakers (athletic shoes only) to the church and put them in one of the blue bins by Door D or in the narthex.

Prayer List

Anthony
Brady Vanes
George Griner
Guy Hendricks
David Markley
David Kingen
Diana and Ray Mendoza
Janet Orem
Cindy Waltz and Sister
Yvonne Suroviak
Georgette and Garry Sknerski
Jakob Holden
Denise Matthys
Florance Cody
Kathy & Chuck Pumnea
Kevin and Annie Windstrup
Rick Parker
Gary Everhart
Darlene O'Brien
Doug & Sue Matthews
Janet Terpstra
Glen Nahler
Tom
David Hamblin
Jana Tolley
Larry & Bonnie Perryman
Delta Rose
Winnie Owen
Breeanne
Mom Bechtler
Marian Clayton
Ella P
Rita Stronczek
Keren, Zuriel, and Gedeon
Edna Cruz
Charlie
Jerry & Rena Martinez
Luana Sulkowski
Sonny Buono
Tammy
Mike Kelly
Sue Heth
Oscar Ochoa
Jean and Clara
Dave Shelborne
Kali Rosalia
Wendy
Jessica S
Shirley McKnight
Kay Johnson
Brooke
Arlene
Shelley
John
Pastor Laurel
Rosie
Rick Parker
Guy Hendricks

Jeremiah 33:14-16

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. 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. 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."

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,
5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— 6 just as the
testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for
the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on
the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the partnership of his Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Mark 13:24-33

24 "But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
25 and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 "Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. 27 Then he will send out
the angels and gather the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know
that summer is near. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very
gates. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31 Heaven and
earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father.
33 Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come.

Living, Breathing Hope

Jeremiah 33:14-16; *1 Corinthians* 1:3-9; *Mark* 13:24-33

I love Advent so very, very deeply! It is this celebration of expectation and anticipation—a before time, a between time, an *almost* beginning time. It's a time commemorating when the world was on the verge of something *incredible* in the truest sense of that word—unheard of, unimaginable, unbelievable. And the people didn't even know it. How could they, if it was something beyond imagination and belief? The eternal, transcendent God was about to enter into time and space. The God of creation of all the universe was about to become incarnate as a human infant born to an unwed teenager in the arid, rocky village of Bethlehem. In his letter to the Romans, Paul so eloquently uses the image of Creation groaning in labor pains to describe the pregnant expectation of the world waiting for a savior. This is the perfect image for the state of everything in those days leading up to the birth of a child in Bethlehem. Just as Mary was carrying Jesus to full term, so was Creation carrying the weight of the Incarnation. Glory was about to burst forth as a newborn being delivered in a stable. And the people didn't even know it. Again, how could they?

They didn't know about the incarnation of the living God, but they knew about *something* that might happen at *sometime* in an uncertain future. You see, throughout their long history the Israelites had had this abstract promise of a messiah who would come and save them from the travails of history that seemed to have plagued them—from their enslavement in Egypt to their bitterly divided kingdom to their Exile in Babylon to their captivity by the Roman Empire. Throughout their history of struggle, they had prophets declaring *someday*, *sometime*, *something* was going to happen. A messiah was going to come. Isaiah described this figure as a suffering servant enduring great violence. Zechariah described this figure as a high priest rebuilding the temple. And in today's reading Jeremiah described him as a warrior king:

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. 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. 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."

Yes, the people indeed had this vague idea that *some* embodiment of these promised messianic figures was going to come *sometime*. But they had no idea who it was going to be or when it was going to happen. And yet, in all this vagueness of time, place, and person, they trusted the promise that had been given by the prophets. And because they trusted that promise, they had this powerful thing called hope. I am convinced that it was hope that got the Israelites through all of those trials and travails over all those years. Of course they had their fair share of grumbling and bitterness and worry and anger. But through it all they had hope. They believed that the God who created them and made a covenant with them and led them through the wilderness and anointed their kings would come through once again in their time of greatest need and save them. This hope kept them alive as a people. In those deepest, darkest moments of slavery, division, exile, and colonization, they had held onto a hope that their God would send *somebody*.

And there they were, toiling under the absurd client kingdom of the Herods, who served the emperors of Rome, whose power could only be compared to that of the Pharaohs of yore. Yes, this is the most apt parallel. The Israelites were once again under the merciless whip of the Pharaohs. One could not have blamed them for giving up at this point…of seeing their storied history of oppression and liberation coming full circle to forced servitude to a pharaonic master. By all logical indicators, they should have given up. They should have despaired. But instead, with those abstract promises of a messiah in hand, they hoped. And they survived. And they persisted. For this struggling, occupied group of exploited laborers in the empire, hope had to be a way of life, a prevailing theme of existence.

I absolutely love the fragile intricacies and bold connections of written and spoken language. I have always been fascinated by the transcendence of certain words and concepts across multiple, seemingly unrelated

languages. And I've been consistently amazed by how certain words are bound to each other in the ways that they are spoken and heard. Perhaps this is why I am so drawn to the image of the Word becoming flesh.

Anyway, I was a student of Latin for much of my younger life. Latin would have been the language of the day for the Palestinian Israelites under Roman control. As soon as I learned the words *spero* and *spiro*, I would never again be able to separate them from each other. *Spero—S-P-E-R-O* means "I hope." *Spiro—S-P-I-R-O* means "I breathe." In some grand scheme, I know that the closeness of these words is not coincidental. I breathe, I hope. I hope, I breathe.

For the Israelites of Roman Palestine, every breath meant hope. And every moment of hope meant more breathing, more life. And as the fragile intricacies of language would have it, the name of the God of their hope was YHWH. If you ever speak that profoundly holy name, you will notice something. It is full of aspiration. The Hebrew characters used represent the sounds of breath. YHWH. At root, the sacred name of God was the act of breathing, the foundation of life. The rawest, most primal force of all. Breath. Hope.

The people still had breath. The people still had life. The people still had hope. And YHWH was about to deliver in a way that they could have never anticipated. It wasn't just a messiah that was coming. It was the *living God* who was coming. All Creation had inhaled and was waiting to exhale with groaning labor pains. The teenager Mary had inhaled the Spirit of God and was waiting to exhale with groaning labor pains.

Today, we are in so many ways different from the Israelites of Roman Palestine. And yet in oh so many ways we are the same. We are different in that we are on the other side of that exhalation, of that birth. We live in the knowledge that our God became flesh and dwelt among us. We have the blessed assurance that our God understands our every vulnerability and loves us both in spite of and because of those vulnerabilities. Because our God has lived those very same vulnerabilities. And in the grandest cosmic sense, we know that in coming to life, our God conquered death.

But, that warrior king messiah never materialized in the way that Jeremiah prophesied and in the way that the people most fervently hoped. Grand cosmic transformation is one thing. Lived history is quite another. The Jesus we saw last week standing before Pontius Pilate was executed by the State apparatus. And afterwards a massive movement known as the Church began and spread like wildfire. But looking at history, the longed for transformation of society, the coming of the Kingdom is yet to be fully accomplished. All too often we have been part and parcel of whatever empire has reigned at any given time. We have given up our unique legacy of hope and become jaded participants in systems of death that prize capital over community, power over people, and independence over interdependence. These systems of death seem to be all consuming, insatiable fires passed on through the generations from Pharaoh to Augustus to the corporations and autocrats of today. So, here we are.

But friends, there is always good news! After all, no matter how jaded we may be, we are still people of hope. At the beginning of this sermon I said that Advent is a before time, a between time, an *almost* beginning time. Advent is also a both/and time. You see, Advent is not *only* a commemoration of the expectant hope of all Creation awaiting the incarnation. Advent is also a time of active, lived expectant hope for all of us. This is a time when we reflect and act upon our belief that the Word made flesh—God incarnate, the child of Mary, Jesus born in Bethlehem—will come back and usher in the final stage of the completion of the Kingdom. This is a time for living, breathing hope!

Jesus himself spoke of it as he stood in the temple in Jerusalem—directly after the poor widow had given her everything and directly before the Passover on which Jesus would institute the Lord's Supper. He declared to the crowd:

The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. "Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power

and glory. Then he will send out the angels and gather the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven."

I can't read this passage about Jesus coming in the clouds without a verse from *The Days of Elijah* bursting into my head, a song that has been with me since my early childhood. **SING!** "Behold he comes, riding on the clouds, shining like the sun, at the trumpet's call. Lift your voice, it's the year of Jubilee, and out of Zion's hill salvation comes!"

Friends, this is our season of hope, that uniquely powerful thing that gives us the will to keep breathing, to stay alive. We don't just believe that Jesus was born, lived, died, came back to life, and ascended to heaven. That's not the end of the story. We believe that Jesus will come back. And with *this* specific hope, we are so like the Israelites of Roman Palestine. We have the promise of this thing happening *sometime somewhere somehow*. And with that promise of uncertain parameters, we must have hope.

Now, some of our scriptures and certainly much of popular culture throughout history has painted the eschaton, the apocalypse, the second coming as a cataclysmic, violent, wrath-filled event to be feared. In accepting that version of events, though, we forget that the messiah is the Prince of Peace and the Incarnation of God and Wisdom. The one for whom we hope is prophesied to bring to completion a kingdom in which the lion shall lie down with the lamb and weapons shall be forged into ploughshares. The fact of his resurrection means that he is that same Jesus, child of Mary, who welcomed all to his table, most especially the poor and outcast. Friends, we are indeed on the other side of that first exhalation, that first incarnation. But we are on *this* side of the next one. Creation is pregnant with expectation. Let hope fill us up with every inhalation. Let us breathe it into all that we do and everyone we meet. Let this broken world know that healing is possible, that something beautiful is on its way. And let us live the hope of the Kingdom so that the whole world will know what to expect and join us in HOPE.

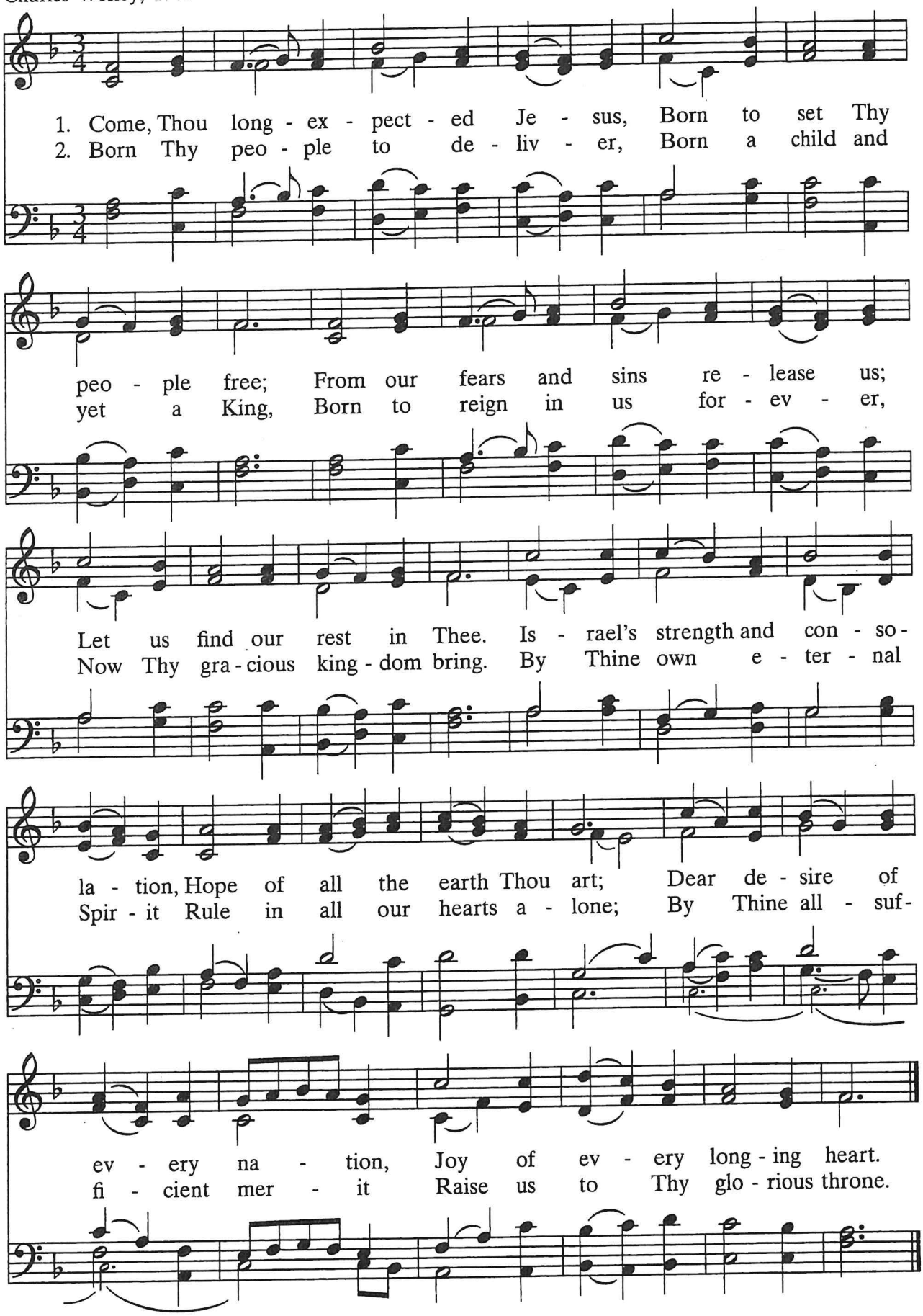
Behold, he comes, riding on the clouds. So, lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. *Spero. Spiro.* I hope. I breathe. Creation is groaning once again in labor pains. Jesus, child of Mary is coming back. Immanuel. YHWH. Amen.

2 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

HYFRYDOL 8.7.8.7 D

Charles Wesley, 1744

Rowland Hugh Prichard, 1831



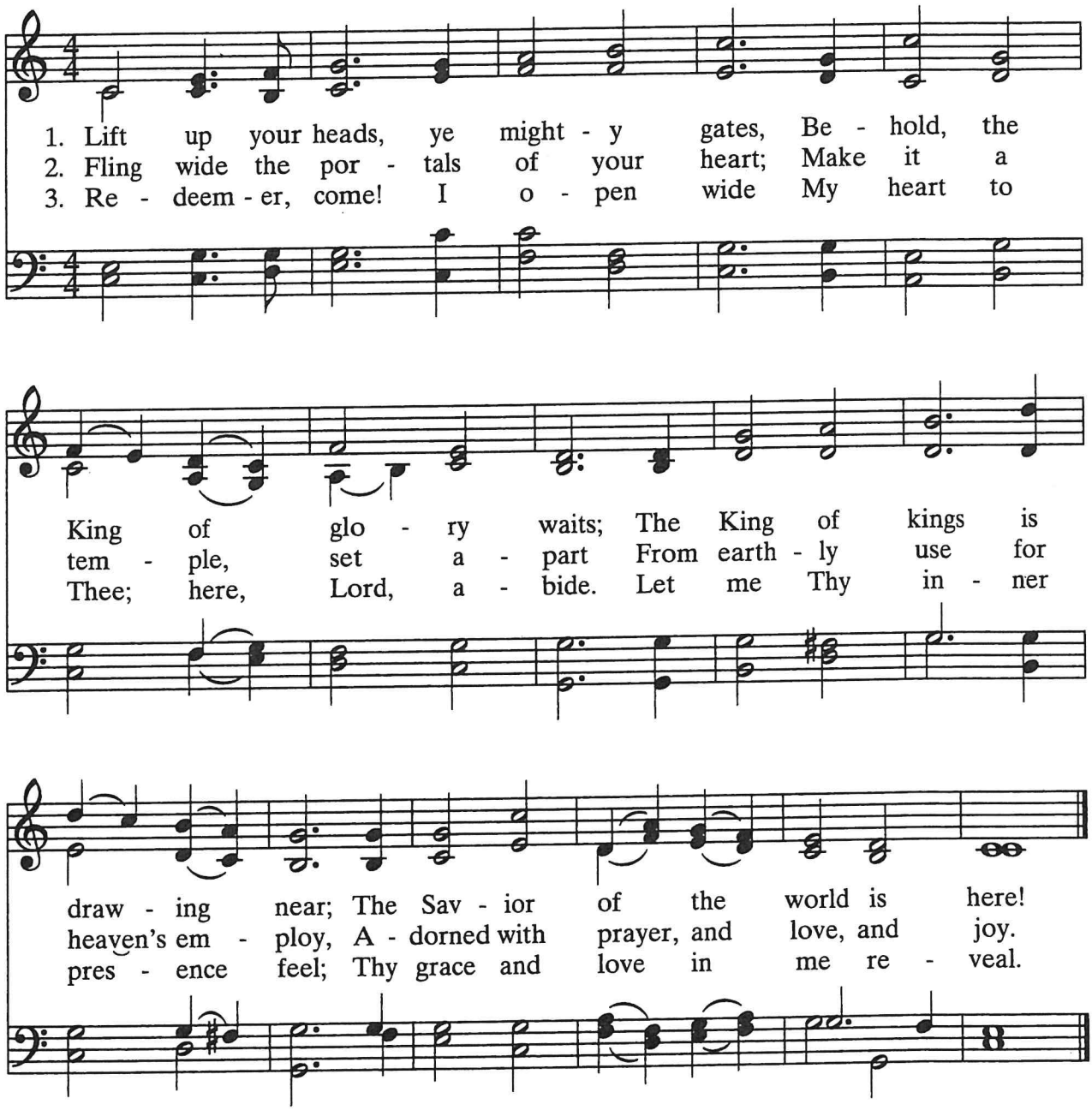
Psalm 24:7–10

Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates 8

TRURO LM

Georg Weissel, 1642
Trans. Catherine Winkworth, 1855

Thomas Williams, 1789
Harm. Lowell Mason (1792–1872)



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