November 27, 2022 + 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.

PRELUDE

The Advent Star

Gilbert M. Martin

WELCOME

CHORAL INTROIT

ANNOUNCEMENTS

*THE PEACE OF CHRIST

Christ's peace is with us always, no matter where we may be. And so, Christ's peace is with each and every one of us in this moment. Let us take it in. Let us really feel it. If able, please stand where you are, look around, and make signs of Christ's peace to each other. If you are at home, give somebody a call after the service to share Christ's peace!

*LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH Nancy and Gerry 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 darkness, those realities 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 embodiment of the light that guides us.

(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 WORSHIP (Adapted from *Psalm* 122)

Leader: I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!" Our feet are

standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly

together.

ALL: Let us go to the house of the LORD!

Leader: To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to

the name of the LORD. For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the

house of David.

ALL: Let us go to the house of the LORD!

Leader: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your

walls, and security within your towers."

ALL: Let us go to the house of the LORD!

Leader: For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of

the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

ALL: Let us go to the house of the LORD, and let us worship there!

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

INVITATION TO CONFESSION:

Leader:

In his letter to the Romans Paul writes, "Let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy." Together let us confess the ways in which we are not living honorably.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (unison)

God of the Promise, we join our hearts and voices in confessing unto you. Help us to repair what we have broken with our transgressions and so to reconcile with each other and with you. As we enter into this season of expectant hope, we confess that we often lower our expectations and lose our hope. We look around us and see systems and situations of evil. We assume that we can do nothing, or we choose to do nothing because we think nothing will change. We ask, "What's the point?" In this way, we live life as though you are not there. We forget that the source of all hope is alive—guiding us and interceding for us. Forgive us, for if the people of the resurrection do not bear hope into this world, then this world is indeed in trouble. To the source of all hope 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. Salvation is nearer to us now than when we became

believers; the night is far gone, the day is near.

ALL:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven! 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

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION: (Unison)

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: *Isaiah* 2:1-5

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 13:11-14

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 24:36-44

SERMON: Christ Will Come Again!

CHORAL ANTHEM: Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

LITANY OF NEW MEMBERSHIP Oliver Keilman

PRAYER SHAWL BLESSING

PASTORAL PRAYER AND 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

We Respond in Faith

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. If you are here in person today and have not yet done so, please place your offering in the plate as you leave. If you are worshiping from home, please mail in your checks or use our online giving option. Now let us take a moment to reflect on stewardship as we hear the offertory.

OFFERTORY

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Franklin Ritter

* 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.

We Go Into the World

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

BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying

Thomas Chesterton

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Life of the Church

PEEK AT THE WEEK

SUNDAY, 11/27: Adult Study – 9:00 AM

Worship in Person & Online – 10:30 AM ADVENTure Activities following Worship

WEDNESDAY, 11/30: "Bring Your Own Bible" Bible Study 7 to 8 PM (Zoom)

THURSDAY, 12/1: Choir – 7:00 PM

Announcements

- <u>CONGREGATIONAL MEETING ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, AFTER WORSHIP</u> There will be a congregational meeting on Sunday, December 11, after worship, for the purpose of electing officers to begin serving in 2023. The Nominating Committee will present a slate of nominees, and nominations will be welcomed from the floor. We will also be considering a motion from Session to make a term-limit exception to our by-laws in order to ensure that our Trustee spots are filled.
- <u>ADVENTure</u> The season of Advent is almost upon us. Starting on Sunday, Nov. 27, the Faith Development team invites everyone to join us in the Fellowship Room after worship each Sunday of Advent for another series of "ADVENTures"! This year's ADVENTure will include a short video each week and an interactive art project for all ages, that will be displayed during the Christmas season in the church different from last year's paper chain project. Stay as long or as short a time as you are able and bring your friends and family!
- <u>CRAFT SALE DECEMBER 4</u> There will be one last chance to buy gifts and decorations for your family and friends or yourself. On December 4th after worship, the crafts will be on display after worship in the Fellowship Hall. Come support the crafters and our general fund.
- <u>COOKIES AND CAROLS—SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, AFTER WORSHIP</u> All our welcome to join our Youth Connections crew to bake cookies, decorate cookies, and sing carols of love to members of our family who could use some Christmas joy! Talk to Heather Casiano if you would like to join or have any questions.
- <u>CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE</u> Our Christmas Cantata will be held during worship on December 18. The Ministry of Mission's bake sale will follow worship that day. Our Christmas Eve service will be in person and online at 7:00 PM on December 24. Our Christmas day service will be fully virtual on Sunday, December 25, at 10:30 AM, so that we can all celebrate the birth of our Savior at home.
- <u>VOCAL CHOIR PRACTICE ON THURSDAYS AT 7:00</u> All are welcome at all singing abilities! We are a low-stress, high-fun group dedicated to bringing glory to God! Let Suzanne Gruoner know if you are interested in joining. You can also let Pastor Tyler know.
- **FELLOWSHIP HOSTS** Our Ministry of Hospitality is seeking hosts for fellowship! There is a sign up board downstairs. Hosting can be as simple as bringing store-bought snacks or as fun as making something if you have the skills!
- <u>ADULT CONNECTIONS</u> Everyone is invited to one or both of our classes! The Sunday morning "Bible in Today's World" class is on Sunday mornings at 9 AM in the upstairs meeting room. Bring Your Own Bible (BYOB) meets Wednesday evenings at 7 PM on Zoom. You don't need to have participated before in order to join, so please feel free to join at any time!
- O PRAYER WALL Inside door D, near the church office, there is an interactive prayer station where all are invited to participate whenever you are in the church building. A piece of chicken wire is hanging on the wall, and there are multiple colors of ribbons on a table, each representing a type of prayer. The idea is for you to choose one or more ribbons that represent the type of prayer you need or want to lift up at that time, and then tie the ribbons onto the chicken wire.
- <u>READ THROUGH THE BIBLE IN A YEAR:</u> We want to encourage everyone to make the Bible a regular part of your daily life no matter how much reading you do. The reading plan can be found in the Larger View each month and on our church's website (www.fpchighland.org). Contact Heather Casiano for more info at hcasiano@fpchighland.org. May this year in the Bible be a blessing to you!

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

- **BLESSING BOX** Our Blessing Box has gained even more importance in this pandemic. Economic impacts are dire, and the most vulnerable in our midst are the most harmed. 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 on food items before donating them.
- <u>HELP STOCK OUR PANTRY!</u> Please pick up a beautifully decorated grocery bag in the narthex to help the church's food pantry. We'd love to have you take a bag home, place some non-perishable food items in the bag, and bring it back to the church to help keep our pantry stocked!

Prayer List

Anthony George Nelson Brady Vanes George Griner Guy Hendricks

Bill and Anettia Holmes

Daniel Litwicki David Markley David Kingen Carmelo

Diana and Ray Mendoza

Janet Orem John Mullen Jeanne Nestor

Cindy Waltz and Sister

Andrew Bobalik Gale Snyder Yvonne Suroviak

U. Chong Wendy

Georgette Sknerski Jakob Holden Denise Matthys Steve & Melinda Gary Studer

Jan Oprea Janet Vargo Robbie

Kate Abernethy Betty Strauser Peter Churitch Chuck Murphy Erin Fozkos

Piper

Laura Buono Domsic The Windstrups Ruth Dekker Rick Parker Barbara Morton Caroline Studer

Cary and Jennifer Pearson

Carol Finley Huilin

Robert Lestina

Holly Letnich Lily Renfro

Marla and Jerry Renfro

Jaden Mendez Frank Falzone Myrna Grove

Doug and Sue Matthews

Kiki Ho

Janet Terpstra and Family

Robert Urich Richard Simmons Glen Nahler

Claudia Szymaszek Jennifer Skippergosh

Tammy Tony B Tom

Renee Williams Jana Tolley Andi Burczyk Rev. Leroy Fassett John Tolbert

Linda Skaggs
Kathy Elroy

Isaiah 2:1-5

2 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ⁴He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. ⁵O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Romans 13:11-14

¹¹ Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone; the day is near. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³ let us walk decently as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in illicit sex and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Matthew 24:36-44

³⁶ "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴² Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Christ Will Come Again!

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-15; Matthew 24:36-44

Happy Advent, everyone! What a blessing it is to commence this season of expectant hope with all of you! I know I say it every year, but I just cannot contain it. I LOVE ADVENT! It is a between time, a liminal time, a both/and time, a waiting time. And I am that oddball who loves the liminal, waiting spaces. Especially airports! I love sitting and waiting before boarding the plane—the longer the better! I know, I know, I am weird in that sense...and in many senses! The reason I love it is because there is really nothing for me to do in that time and space besides sit and read or sit and think or sit and people watch while I wait. I can't really do work there. I can't really have private phone calls there. It is one of those few opportunities when my body and brain can both press pause, guilt free, before the flurry of activity that will be the flight and whatever comes next wherever I am going. And that is how I think of Advent. It is an intentional pause as we wait to fly high with the birth of Christ.

Let me get my phrasing even more accurate and poetic here, given the nature of this season preceding the birth—it is a pregnant pause! For, in the midst of that waiting there is a lot going on under the surface! During the pregnant pause of Advent, we are nourished by some of our favorite stories read from the Word of God—and yes, it is ok to have favorites! We are nourished by songs sung on Sundays—some of the best liturgical music of the year!—and sure some of those secular holiday classics that are already crooning through our radios! We are nourished by the way that God carries us through the complicated mix of emotions that always accompanies the holidays. Really, I think it is a fruitful image to envision ourselves all held in God's womb this season, being nurtured in the most sacred of environments as God gently dances and sings to us the lullaby tunes of Adventen hymns. With this image in mind, we will also be born anew along with the Christ child come Christmas day. Yes, a pregnant pause indeed!

And as I have said in years gone by, and as I will say in years to come ad nauseam, this pregnant pause of Advent is not a passive pause! We are not just waiting and watching idly. We are waiting and watching with intention. We are actively practicing expectant hope! We are focusing in on God's promises and opening our hearts and eyes to the evidence of their potential fulfillment in Creation, in our interactions with fellow human beings, in our experiences of joy in everyday life. We are lifting up prayers for the fulfillment of those promises—for peace and justice and reconciliation and healing. We are doing the work of making sure that those who have the most reason to be hopeless in this world will witness hope shining through the darkness!

And wow, do we ever need hope in our lives right now! With war after war, natural disaster after natural disaster, mass shooting after mass shooting, hate crime after hate crime, virus after virus, rising price after rising price, do we ever need hope in our lives right now! It's hard out there, loved ones. And when it's hard on the outside, it makes it hard on the inside. It activates our anxiety, our depression, our rage, our fear, and, most insidiously, our despair. Despair is perhaps the hardest reality of all the realities to live with. For, we humans can be beaten down and at the end of our rope but still have hope for something better. When we lose hope, though, there is nowhere else to go. So I urge you, my loved ones, if you know somebody who is in the depths of despair, please do all that you can to reignite the light of hope! If you yourself are in the depths of despair, please look up to see if you can see even the faintest of flickering flames. Please reach out with your extinguished candle and open yourself up to the possibility of one of your loved ones here reaching out with their candle light to meet you halfway. We are here for you!

Now let me be clear here. Hope is no cheap thing! It is not just a simple flick of a lighter and poof it's there! Hope is born of struggle, of people joining together with each other and with God's Spirit to transform the systems and structures that create despair. Hope is born of faith, of belief in the goodness of God and the truth of God's promises. And sometimes when circumstances have made faith hard for somebody, we ourselves have to become the evidence of God's goodness and God's promises with our labors of love and compassion. Hope is born of creativity, of expanding our imaginations to new horizons, of envisioning possibilities that are beyond what we can observe in the here and now. Yes, hope requires hard work! We have to chop the wood, forage for the kindling, and build the log scaffolding. Only then does the flick of the lighter do anything that will last! AND we have to invite others to join us around the fire. Only then does the light and warmth mean anything worthwhile.

I know, I know, I am mixing metaphors of candle lighting and campfires! But both are so powerful, so meaningful, so accurate! Songs are sung around both. Hearts and hands and spirits are joined around both. Both require a base to be ignited, a source of heat to do the igniting, and oxygen to feed the flame. Hmmm, perhaps we can combine this into a single metaphor or image of hope! We humans hold out the candle, God ignites it with promises and evidence of the possibility of those promises, the Holy Spirit breathes life into the flame to keep it going, and together we use the flame of that candle to light the campfire we have built with our labors of love. Hey, what can I say? I'm on fire for hope!

And there is very good reason for that fire, for God has provided us with the greatest promise of all, the greatest spark, the greatest source of heat and light to make hope possible! Christ came to this earth, born of Mary! Christ came back, born of the womb of the tomb! And here's our lesson for today—Christ will come again! We say it at least once a month at the Lord's table as we proclaim the mysteries of faith: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!" Oh yes, do we ever have reason to hope! The King we learned about last week, who loves all, who welcomes all, who breaks down the walls so that all may actually be welcome, who heals the broken, who feeds the hungry, who makes mighty miracles out of mustard seed mites like the widow's coin and the young boys' bread, who pioneers paths of peace, who wields words of Wisdom instead of weapons of war, who stands up to empires and transforms the instrument of death into a tool to defeat very death itself. This Christ, our King, will come again! In the words of Matthew, we must be ready, "for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Now, the rest of the words from today's passage from *Matthew* could be considered quite bleak. "Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left." In popular interpretation, that has been read as referring to a rapture, an event during which the truly faithful are miraculously taken into heaven like Enoch and Elijah of long ago, while the rest are left behind—in other words abandoned. That interpretation doesn't make any sense to me, though. For, we hear elsewhere in God's promise that there will be a new Heaven AND a new Earth. We hear that when Christ comes again, his Kingdom will be on Earth. All Creation will be redeemed. All Creation will be made new. And so, nobody will be abandoned. For, Christ does not abandon! He leaves ninety-nine just to find one, and then brings that one back so that all will be under his care. Whether in Heaven or on Earth, Christ the King will be there in the full glory of his full love! Yes, my loved ones, the source of heat and light, the source of hope is right there in God's promise. Christ will come again! When he died, he did not leave us! He came back to life! He came back to love us! And when he ascended to Heaven, he did not leave us! He went to prepare the way for us. He went to intercede for us. He went to watch over us. And he left his Spirit with us, to keep breathing life into the flames of hope, the flames that keep us alive. And he is coming back!

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again! Hallelujah! Into the midst of the messes that we have made, Christ will come again! Into the midst of the wars and the natural disasters and the mass shootings and the hate crimes and the viruses and the rising prices, Christ will come again! And there will be fire, as popular imagination likes to portray the eschaton, but it will not harm us. It will be the fire of hope! And it will burn down the walls that we have built and the weapons we have made, the systems of hate and the structures of violence. It will melt the hardness of our hearts. It will provide us warmth in the winter of our despair. And we will join hearts and hands and spirits and lift our voices and sing! What Love! What Joy! What Peace! What hope!

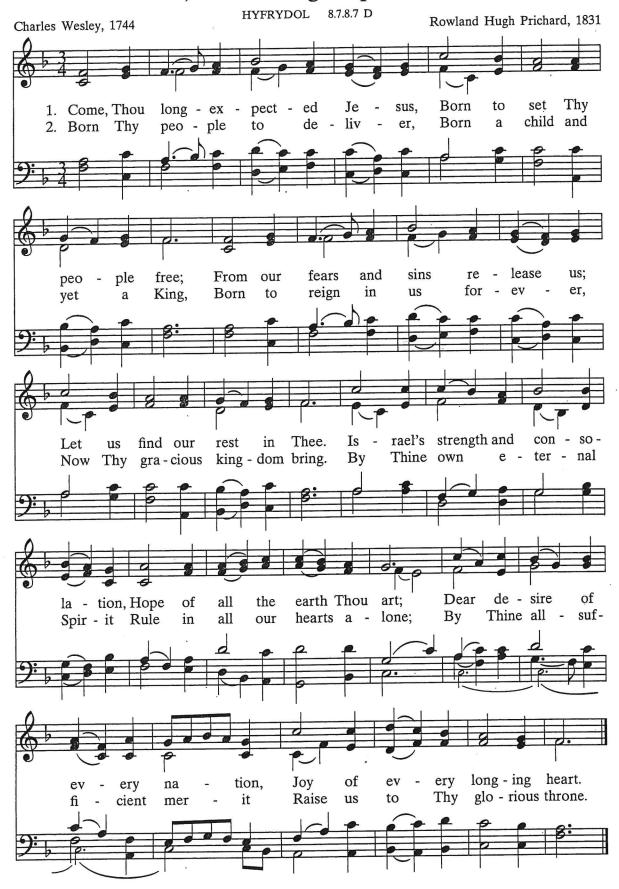
Christ prepared the way for us to go to Heaven. How can we prepare the way for him to come back to Earth? How can we be ready like *Matthew* urges us to? How can we cut the wood and forage for the kindling and build the scaffolding of logs? By making the most of this pregnant pause—by looking for the evidence and reflecting on our reasons for hope, by struggling against the systems and structures that cause despair, by having faith enough to cover those whose faith has been beaten out of them, by getting creative and expanding our imaginations, by reaching out with the flames of our candles to meet halfway those whose candles have been extinguished, by loving all, by welcoming all—in short, by following the example of Christ who came, of Christ who came back, of Christ who will come again!

Yes, loved ones, this is Advent, the both/and, when we wait for the Christ child to be born and when we wait for Christ the King to come back again! I have hope! Do you? Shall we join together around the fire?

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Amen!





Alternate tune: STUTTGART, 1

Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates



